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Contemporary Art in Japan and Cuteness in Japanese Popular Culture

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Abstract

This thesis is an art historical study focussing on contemporary Japan, and in particular the artists Murakami Takashi, Mori Mariko, Aida Makoto, and Nara Yoshitomo. These artists represent a generation of artists born in the 1960s who use popular culture to their own ends. From the seminal exhibition 'Tokyo Pop' at Hiratsuka Museum of Art in 1996 which included all four artists, to Murakami's group exhibition 'Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture' which opened in April 2005, central to my research is an exploration of contemporary art's engagement with the pervasiveness of cuteness in Japanese culture.

Including key secondary material, which recognises cuteness as not merely something trivial but involving power play and gender role issues, this thesis undertakes an interdisciplinary analysis of cuteness in contemporary Japanese popular culture, and examines how contemporary Japanese artists have responded, providing original research through interviews with Aida Makoto, Mori Mariko and Murakami Takashi.
Themes examined include the deconstruction of the high and low in contemporary art; *shôjo* (girl) culture and cuteness; the relation of cuteness and the erotic; the transformation of cuteness into the grotesque; cuteness and nostalgia; and virtual cuteness in Japanese science fiction animation, and computer games.

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Note

Japanese names are given in the Japanese order with the family name first.

All Japanese translations are by the author unless otherwise stated.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This thesis is an art historical study focussing on contemporary Japan, and in particular the artists Murakami Takashi, Mori Mariko, Aida Makoto, and Nara Yoshitomo. These artists represent of a generation of artists born in the 1960s who use popular culture to their own ends. From the groundbreaking exhibition 'Tokyo Pop' at Hiratsuka Museum of Art in 1996, which included all four artists, to Murakami's group exhibition 'Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture' which opened in April 2005, central to my research is an exploration of contemporary art's engagement with the pervasiveness of cuteness in Japanese culture.

These four artists deal with different aspects and issues that form the discourse around cuteness, including the proliferation of cuteness in Japanese popular culture and its origins; cuteness and kitsch, and debates surrounding the commodification of art; cuteness and the erotic, in particular *rorikon* (Lolita complex) and the subculture of *otaku*, including the obsessive fanatics of *manga* (Japanese comics) and *anime* (animated films); the transformation of cuteness into the grotesque; cuteness and nostalgia; and cuteness and new technology, including virtual reality.

Cuteness is now so salient in Japanese culture, that it represents an everyday aesthetic. (McVeigh 1996, 308) Brian McVeigh refers to cuteness as a 'key symbol in Japanese society.' (McVeigh 1996, 293) Sharon Kinsella states the word '*kawaii*' (cute) was in 1992 the most widely used, widely loved, habitual word in modern living Japanese. (Kinsella 1995, 221) Susan Napier also refers to the Japanese 'culture of kawaii', (Napier 2000, 29) and Sawaragi Noi even alludes to a 'rule by cuteness' in Japan. (Sawaragi 1992, 75) How have Japanese contemporary artists commented on the proliferation of cuteness in Japanese popular culture, and what insights can contemporary art provide? 'Cuteness and Kitsch' the Shiseido Gallery, Tokyo and Art Tower Mito's joint exhibition in 2001, is a rare example of an exhibition which sought to go beyond the traditional associations and develop a new understanding of the meanings of these concepts.

Previous research into cuteness has been limited, both within the field of popular culture and fine art. Cuteness has been a fringe value in art of different periods, and Matsui Midori's essay '*Kawairashisa no shinri, shihai to itsudatsu no kôsô*' (The Psychology of

Cuteness: the structure of its dominance and deviations), (Matsui 1996a, 24-41) is one of the few texts dealing directly with cuteness and art. Looking at contemporary art in general, she argues that cuteness usually has a derogatory meaning, and, at least from the point of view of modernism and modernist thinkers, it is associated with kitsch. Matsui's article, which was part of special feature on cute in the journal *Bijutsu Techô*, while highlighting the relative lack of research on cuteness specifically, focuses mainly on Western artists such as Kim Dingle. In his essay '*Tokyo Pop to wa nani ka*?' (What is Tokyo Pop?), Sawaragi Noi compares Nara Yoshitomo and Murakami Takashi to the American artists Mike Kelley and Jeff Koons, who had been using cute kitsch since his 1989 'Banality' exhibition. (Sawaragi 1999a, 70-78) Research on cuteness in the work of new Japanese artists is relatively lacking, and it is the aim of this thesis to make a contribution to this field.

Within Japanese art history studies of these four artists are often incomplete. Murakami himself has claimed that the art world largely overlooked his *Miss Ko*^{2} project, for example. (Murakami 2001. 89) Recently Murakami has had much more media attention in Japan, from both the popular press and serious art journals, particularly since 2003 and the selling of his work *Miss Ko*^{2} by Christie's, New York for 567,500 dollars. His collaboration with Louis Vuitton in the same year also brought a great deal of publicity and popular magazine interviews, but they often lack any serious analysis. Murakami's exhibitions in America and Europe, and Nara's in Germany, have lead to a number of reviews, and catalogue essays by Western art theorists, but these rarely focus on cuteness, and often lack in-depth analysis of Japanese culture.

The press reaction to Murakami's 2002 show in London at the Serpentine Gallery was very critical. *The Guardian*, for example, referred to 'a nasty kind of infantilism' and 'sub-surreal stupidities,' and claimed 'there was no sign of any internal critique, just a lot of very high-class production values.' (Searle 2002, 16) This highlights both the necessity of a full awareness of the context for Japanese contemporary art, namely Japanese popular culture, and the problem of contemporary art maintaining a critical position. Do Pop Art signs simply replay the scene of consumerist desire, or do they prise open a critical gap in it? Murakami's theory of Super Flat revisits the kitsch versus avant-garde debate raised by the Pop Art of the 1960s, preferring a new reading of Pop Art which focuses on its decoding and deciphering of popular culture. Sawaragi has argued that in adopting the

semblance to cute consumer products, the final aim is to demythologize. (Sawaragi 1999a, 70-78) While there is still a view which demands that 'high art' maintains a critical position, Jean Baudrillard argues however, that even as we might read subversion into art, this represents simply a nostalgia for critical art. (Baudrillard 2001, 144) Even if these artists do try to put forward a critical gap, is it in reality closed? The possibility of maintaining a critical position is an important question for this thesis.

It might be pointed that the Japanese art world infrastructure itself has had an influence on contemporary artistic practice. In Japan artists typically rent the gallery space for the duration of the exhibition. It could be argued that the commercial nature of gallery space might reinforce art's links with popular culture. While this is a consideration, there has been a recent shift in Japan to new kinds of galleries which more closely resemble European and American models, and particularly the four artists examined in this thesis have exhibited in this way.

Unwrapping Cuteness: an interdisciplinary approach

The group exhibition 'Tokyo Pop' at Hiratsuka Museum of Art in 1996, and the exhibition 'Ironic Fantasy - Another World by Five Contemporary Artists' at the Miyagi Museum of Art in the same year, both included the artists Murakami Takashi, Aida Makoto, Nara Yoshitomo and Mori Mariko. All four artists were born in the 1960s, and these exhibitions are shaped by the factor of 'generation'. (Sawaragi 1996, n.p.) These artists, as Sawaragi states, 'deconstruct their identity under the influence of pop culture' that consists of comics, animation, pop music, and high technology. (Sawaragi 1996, n.p.) Sawaragi also points out that what must not be forgotten is the influence and relationship to the economic environment of the 1980s in Japan, a time when a 'highly developed consumption culture emerged.' (Sawaragi 1996, n.p.)

Aida Makoto also participated in 'The Group 1965: The Voices from Tokyo' exhibition at the Contemporary Art Factory, Tokyo in 1998. Aida is a member of *Shôwa 40 nenkai*, or Group 1965, a loose group of artists born in the year 1965, who, as Matsui suggests, represent a return to an indigenous structure of anti-modernity inspired by *angura*. (Matsui 2002, 142) *Angura*, an abbreviation of 'underground', was the word attached to the artistic experiments of the 1960s. In reaction to Japanese high culture's dependence on the

translations of modernist plays and fiction, *angura* turned to domestic reality for material and inspiration.

The group exhibitions 'Tokyo Pop' and 'Ironic Fantasy - Another World by Five Contemporary Artists' offer different perspectives on the new Pop art that appeared in the early 1990s.

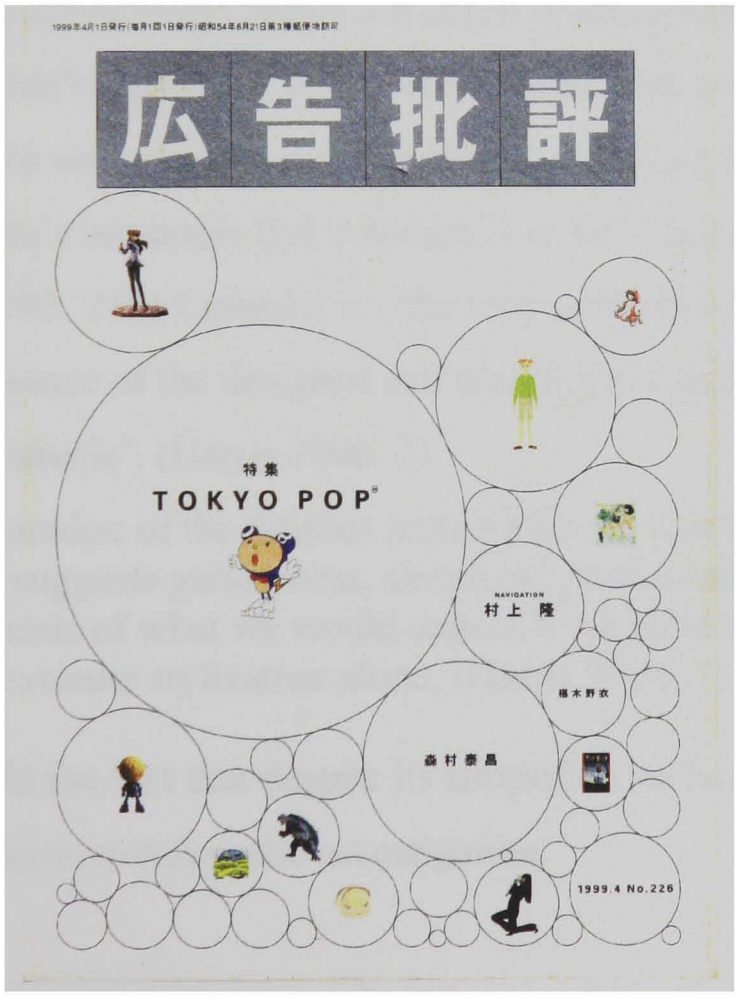
> While 'Ironic Fantasy' focussed on the artists' critical analyses of Japanese hyperconsumer culture, 'Tokyo Pop' emphasized their response to the significant cultural change that occurred in the 1970s: the rapid transformation of Japan into a postindustrial society and emerging of the mass consumer culture nationwide. 'Tokyo Pop' gave powerful representations to the sense of anxiety caused by this situation. (Matsui 1997, 110)

These exhibitions present the possibility of the study of broad trends in Japanese contemporary art. Interviews with Murakami Takashi, Aida Makoto and Mori Mariko, form a key part of the research for the thesis. They allowed for specific questions regarding cuteness to be put to the artists directly, and provide significant new material, and an original contribution to the knowledge of contemporary Japanese art, and further the understanding of cuteness in Japanese popular culture.

The monthly art journal *Bijutsu Techô* (Art Notebook) is one of the key journals for Japanese contemporary art, and has published a number of interviews with these artists, and translating these texts provided additional important research material for this thesis. The May 1999 issue of *Bijutsu Techô* featured a 'Murakami special', for example; the cover shows Murakami's character *Mr. DOB*. (Ill.1-1) Kusumi Kiyoshi, editor of *Bijutsu Techô*, along with the art critic Sawaragi Noi, and Ikeuchi Tsutomo, manager of the Roentgen Art Institute, 'can be regarded as the god-fathers', of 'Neo Pop' in the early 1990s, 'as all three had a decisive influence on the dissemination of the ideas.' (Brehm 2002, 19)

This research of cuteness in popular culture through Japanese contemporary art, while focusing on exhibitions, artists' statements, and close readings of individual works, must

1-1. *Bijutsu Techô*, May 1999
Journal cover vol.51 no.770 featuring Murakami Takashi's character *Mr. DOB*



1-2. *Kôkoku Hihyô*, April 1999
Journal cover no. 226

also involve studies from outside the field of art criticism, and take on an interdisciplinary approach. The journal *Kôkoku Hihyô* (Advertising Review), for example, whose subject is actually trends in advertising, also featured a special on Tokyo Pop. (Ill.1-2) Non-art historical sources provide important material, with magazines such as *Model Graphix*, and *Brutus* also having published features, and artist interviews.

An everyday aesthetics of cuteness now permeates almost every aspect of Japanese culture. The police force for example, have their own cute character *Pipo-kun*, which acts as a kind of mascot. (Ill.1-3) Various banks have used other popular cute characters, such as Dick Bruna's *Miffy*, or Sanrio's *Hello Kitty*. There is an emphasis on cuteness that goes beyond, but is related to, things that were once perhaps marketed solely at girls. In order to examine fully the meanings and uses of cuteness this study draws on texts from areas outside art history, including anthropology and sociology.

That cuteness is often dismissed as trivial and superficial has lead to a lack of serious analysis. There is an argument though that a more detailed analysis may well reveal significant results. Brian McVeigh points out that it is *Hello Kitty*'s innocuousness that conceals her power. (McVeigh 2000, 226) Daniel Harris also recognises that while everywhere we turn we see cuteness, most people do not recognise its artificiality, and echoes Sharon Kinsella's argument that cuteness is in fact 'extremely artificial and stylized.' (Kinsella 1995, 240) Cuteness is 'the very embodiment of innocence' and as such represents an absence of the designed and manipulated qualities of what is in fact a 'heavily mannered aesthetic'. (Harris 2000, 2)

> The chilling paradox of the fetishes over which we croon so irrepressibly is that their cuteness suggests guilessness, simplicity, and a refreshing lack of affectation, the very antithesis of what we would expect if we were to judge these toys on the basis of their extreme stylization alone. (Harris 2000, 3)

These studies highlight the fact that despite its simplified surface, cuteness is in fact multifaceted, and requires a systematic investigation.

Murakami states that Japan's character culture is one of communication design, and argues that Japanese people use cuteness to disguise what they really want to say. (Murakami in Gomez 1999, 18) Taking this concept of cuteness as a camouflage, one aim of this thesis is to uncover some of the meanings which at first glance are hidden. Eleanor Heartney for

1-3. *Pipo-kun*, 2001
Police sign
Photo the author

example, refers to the 'painful contradictions', which lie beneath the surface of the made-in-America view of Japan and the Disneylandesque qualities of modern Tokyo. (Heartney 1990, 213)

In Aida's works it is possible to detect an anti-modernism which resonates with Jameson's notions of the postmodern. In 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' Jameson states that one of the key features of postmodernism is that it emerges as

> a reaction against the established forms of modernism, against this or that dominant high modernism which conquered the university, the museum, the art gallery network, and the foundations. (Jameson 1983, 111)

Jameson points out that before we try and locate resistance to the dominant forces, it is first necessary to identify those dominant forces. Postmodernism can be seen as a new cultural logic in its own right, as something more than a mere reaction. Jameson's use of postmodernism as a framework, is to provide 'a principle for the analysis of cultural texts which is at the same time a working system that can show the general ideological function of all these features taken together.' (Jameson quoted in Stephanson 1986/87, 69)

Jameson's study of postmodernism, in which he highlights 'pastiche and schizophrenia', and also nostalgia as key features, resonates with the 1990s scene in Japan. (Jameson 1983, 111-125)

> Insofar as Postmodernism *really expresses* multinational capitalism, there is some cognitive content to it. It is articulating something that is going on. If the subject is lost in it, and if in social life the psychic subject has been decentered by late capitalism, then this art faithfully and authentically registers that. That is its moment of truth. (Jameson quoted in Stephanson 1986/87, 71)

This thesis, through the close examination of their works and exhibitions, attempts to locate the points where contemporary Japanese artists offer new perspectives on the contemporary scene in Japan. As Jameson states 'individual artists are only interesting if one finds some moment where the system as a whole, or some limit of it, is being touched.' (Jameson quoted in Stephanson 1986/87, 72)

In the exhibition 'Super Flat' which began in Parco Gallery, Tokyo in 2000 Murakami outlines his theory of the Super Flat, in which he implies that, while his concept is restricted to Japan, the applications are global. 'The world of the future might be like Japan is today – super flat. Society, customs, art, and culture: all are extremely two-dimensional.'

(Murakami 2000, 5) Jameson also refers to 'a certain flatness', a lack of not only visual depth, but also interpretive depth. 'Disneyland is on the whole supremely prophetic and paradigmatic of a lot of this stuff.' (Jameson quoted in Stephanson 1986/87, 70)

Japan is the place 'where Jameson and Baudrillard coincide'. (Melville 1989, 283) In 'Hyper-Consumer Society and the Role of the Intellectual: the round-table discussion with Karatani, Derrida, and Asada' published in the *Asahi Journal*, (Asada, Derrida & Karatani, 1984, 6-14) Karatani asserts that contemporary Japanese capitalism has gone beyond even Baudrillard's consumer society, into some other 'extremely abnormal situation'. (Karatani quoted in Ivy 1989, 42) According to Miyoshi Masao postmodernism fits Japan very well – the dispersal and demise of modern subjectivity, the postmodern erasure of historicity, and parody. 'Even Baudrillard might find Japan's devotion to simulacra a little frightening.' (Miyoshi 1989, 148) The new age of culture in Japan 'is not only a universal condition to be followed by all societies but, more importantly, merely the last stage of a social model envisaged first by the modern West.' (Miyoshi and Harootunian 1989, xiii)

Manga (Japanese comics) and *anime* (Japanese animation) are a part of Japanese popular culture that has attracted a great deal of research, and another source of in-depth studies regarding cuteness. *Manga* are key to the spread of cute characters in everyday life in Japan: Shiokawa Kanako argues *manga* transformed the original 'cuteness' trend into a visual and conceptual icon that, in turn, has evolved on its own accord.

> The changing attitude toward 'cute' in Japan was in part engendered by the *manga* tradition in the post-war period, and the phenomenal success of the comics medium as a source of public entertainment encouraged the aesthetical appreciation of the 'cute' revolution. (Shiokawa 1999, 97)

Walt Disney and Tezuka Osamu, who were very influential in the 1950s and 1960s, continue to be key influences today. The study of *manga* is important because they are 'not escapes from the tedium of everyday life, but are implicated in how that life is constructed and experienced.' (Treat 1996b, 8)

Shôjo manga in particular played an important role in the popularity of cuteness. Shiokawa traces the birth of cute to its schoolgirl subculture origin in the 1960s, when the word '*kawaii*' was an in-group slang word used only by certain schoolgirl cliques. (Shiokawa 1999, 97) *Shôjo* culture is an important part of Japanese popular culture and quite separate

from other aspects. John Whittier Treat argues that *shôjo* culture is all about consumption, consumption as pleasure, as play, and as creative act. (Treat 1993, 353-387) The new *shôjo* culture that came into its own during the 'fancy-goods' boom of the 1970s and 1980s was characterised by cuteness. Sanrio, the company responsible for *Hello Kitty*, was marketing an aesthetic. In Brian Belson and Ken Bremner's book *Hello Kitty: The Remarkable Story of Sanrio and the Billion Dollar Feline Phenomenon*, they refer to a 'culture of cute', which grew up around this time, and which they describe as 'a unique blend of post-modern desire and infantile affection.' (Belson and Bremner 2004, 6) *Hello Kitty* experienced another boom in 1997, when teenage pop idol Kahara Tomomi declared her love for *Hello Kitty* on the well-known television show *Utaban*.

The abolition of 'historicity and historical depth' is another key characteristic of postmodernism. (Jameson quoted in Stephanson 1986/87, 69) Jameson refers to 'the disappearance of a sense of history.' (Jameson 1985, 125) This resonates with Asada Akira who, in his essay 'Infantile Capitalism and Japan's Postmodernism: A Fairy Tale', states that where modernization is the process of maturation, Japan 'did not at all mature', but 'seems to be growing progressively more infantile,' and that Japan's process of 'infantilization' is 'a parody of Hegelian world history.' (Asada 1989, 276) The question of whether the proliferation of cuteness represents the 'infantilization' of Japanese culture, referred to by cultural critics such as Asada Akira, is examined in detail in chapter 2.

Why the apparent obsession with all things cute among many Japanese women? According to McVeigh's survey, the most common responses to this query were because cuteness is 'comforting', 'soothing', 'relaxing', 'makes one feel warm inside', 'adds a feeling of security'. (McVeigh 1996, 294) McVeigh also points out that there were those who explained that cuteness in a more analytical vein as a form of escape from the real world, or at least from the high-pressure social world of Japan. Cuteness is tied to fantasy, and a way of forgetting about the troubles of everyday life. (McVeigh 1996, 294) The abundance of the cute aesthetic, according to Sharon Kinsella, is a reaction to the dehumanizing atmosphere of corporate culture, in Japan's 'high-tech, de-personalized condition of postmodernity.' (Kinsella 1995, 220)

To regard cuteness only as a decorative surface layer would be to make the mistake of applying a Western perception and regard wrapping as merely a means to obscure the object inside.

> To try to take off the layers of wrapping, always to be seeking essences, in this way we may be throwing out some of the important cultural information we need, perhaps only to find nothing at all – or a strange, significant emptiness – inside. (Hendry 1993, 173)

In Japan the function of wrapping is, rather than to refine the object, to add layers of meaning. Joy Hendry's study of the practice of wrapping in Japan points out that the object enclosed and the wrapping enclosing it cannot in fact be so easily separated from each other. (Hendry 1993, 27) Referring to the logic of giving a gift, Roland Barthes also observes that in Japanese culture the point is not what it contains, but that 'the triviality of the thing' is 'put off' by being 'wrapped with as much sumptuousness as a jewel'. (Barthes 1982, 46) Hendry's study highlights the fact that, while Japan is the main focus, the principles may be applicable to other social systems.

Anthropological studies provide a number of key studies into cuteness and Japanese popular culture, and have positioned cuteness as a complex, paradoxical commentary on socio-political relations. McVeigh argues cuteness reinforces vertical power relations, male/female relations particularly, and the hierarchical nature of Japanese society in general. Cuteness always to some extent aestheticises powerlessness. Communicated through commercialisation and commodification, cute things become objectified sentiment, commenting on and supporting a normative discourse about gender definitions. For McVeigh, cuteness can be condensed to two key concepts: powerlessness and power.

Kinsella, in her 'Comments on McVeigh' published in the same *Journal of Material Culture*, questions McVeigh's analysis of cuteness, particularly his conclusion that cuteness communicates messages about being the 'ideal' woman. (Kinsella 1997, 383-385) Kinsella prefers to focus on its association with the increasing freedom of young women, interpreting the cuteness trend as 'a kind of rebellion or refusal to cooperate with established social values and realities.' (Kinsella 1995, 43) While McVeigh's references to stereotypical Japanese values such as hierarchy, lead to Kinsella being critical of what she saw as his Orientalist vision of Japan, Kinsella's use of Western gender theory is also an issue that needs challenging.

Sawaragi Noi draws a connection between the rising trend of cuteness and the imperial system in Japan. 'In Japan we have many cute objects, cute styles of art, which have deep roots in our parliamentary monarchy.' (Sawaragi 1992, 75) Sawaragi in particular refers to the last moments of the reign of emperor Hirohito.

> [T]he postwar emperor Hirohito was very popular among the people as a cute, old man. In one sense this cuteness was neutral, in another, it was controlling. Couldn't one call this rule by "cuteness" rather than "rule by power"? It brings to mind a feminine way of controlling; cute objects and cute art actually do not have any relationship with the context of feminism, but they reflect the oppression of individualism under the emperor in postwar democracy. (Sawaragi 1992b, 75)

These issues of cuteness and power relations, that need careful unpicking, are examined in more detail in chapter 2.

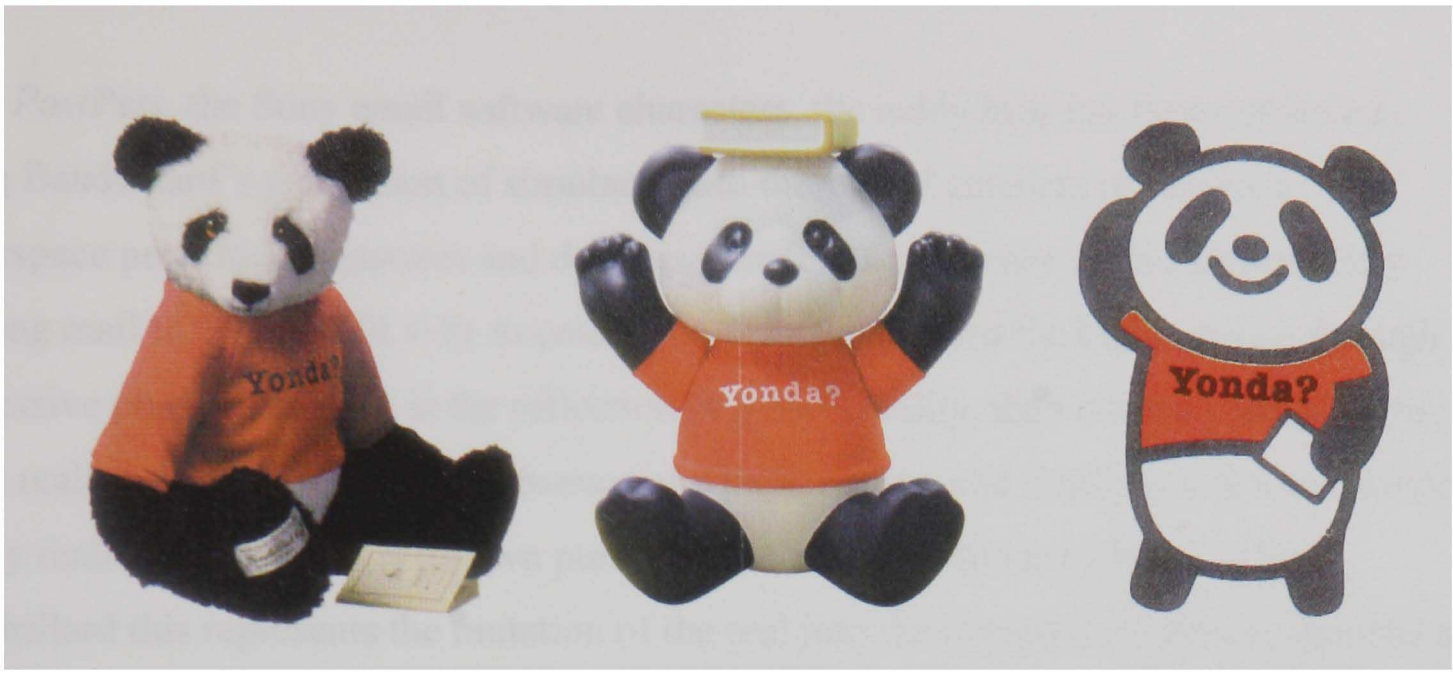
The Importance of Cuteness

While there has been relative neglect of this subject by previous researchers, the research into cuteness is important on several theoretical and practical grounds, particularly in the contribution it can make to the understanding of postmodernism, which 'expresses the inner truth of that newly emergent social order of late capitalism.' (Jameson 1983, 113) Azuma Hiroki, for example, claims the 'character culture' of Japan, is representative of the postmodern condition. (Azuma 2000b, 2-8)

Cuteness is a major aesthetic development of the 20th century. A series of pandas used by the Japanese promotional book club *Yonda*? in various marketing campaigns highlights this design evolution. (Ill.1-4) It is possible to see a progression from original teddy bear designs from the 1880s, which were relatively naturalistic in appearance, to the more rounded teddy bear design starting around the 1970s, 'a consequence of the need to increase huggability.' (Harris 2000, 10)

> Over the last few decades, Pooh and Paddington have improved their posture, sprouted fat, dwarfish arms, and, moreover, submitted to a barrage of rhinoplastic amputations that has turned their crunching mandibles into harmless bulges that protrude only slightly from round, unthreatening faces. (Harris 2000, 10)

The third image shows how the *Yonda?* panda has become more iconic in shape and appearance, as it takes on the modern graphic status of a cartoon bear. Philip Brophy refers to this as a 'continually transforming morphology', which shows a clear transformation from the realist panda to the 'corporate logoism of the modern cute biomorph', and the



1-4. *Yonda?*, 1998-2002
Images of pandas taken from separate advertising campaigns

1-5. *PostPet*, 1996
Momo
Sony Communications

major trait, this 'complex semiotic continuum' defines, is cute. (Brophy 1997, 28)

With *PostPets*, the Sony email software characters, the teddy bear has now continued along Baudrillard's precession of simulacra into the virtual cuteness of *Momo*, a cyberspace pet which organizes and delivers e-mails for its owner, even independently sending mail to friends. (Ill.1-5) According to Jean Baudrillard the image passes through successive phases. Firstly it is the reflection of a basic reality, then it masks and perverts a basic reality, thirdly it masks the *absence* of a basic reality, and finally it bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum. (Baudrillard 1983, 11) For Baudrillard this represents the mutation of the real into the hyperreal. Cuteness signifies an idealized social world, an exaggerated environment radically divorced from the real world. 'Like the bear/teddy bear/cartoon-bear conflation, most depictions of cuteness do not aim to copy, say, the visage of the baby, but instead intend to codify the happy/kind domain of the baby.' (Brophy 1997, 28)

With swollen legs, rounded bodies and faces, useless pink stump fingers, or arms cut off at the wrist, Daniel Harris argues the aesthetic of cuteness creates a class of outcasts and mutations.

> Cuteness is not an aesthetic in the ordinary sense of the word and must by no means be mistaken for the physically appealing, the attractive. In fact, it is closely linked to the grotesque, the malformed. (Harris 2000, 3)

The element of the grotesque in cuteness is deliberate, an explicit intention to elicit the complex emotions we feel when we encounter cute characters.

> The grotesque is cute because the grotesque is pitiable, and the primary emotion of this seductive and manipulative aesthetic that arouses our sympathies by creating anatomical pariahs, like the Cabbage Patch Dolls, or even E.T. (Harris 2000, 4)

The issue of cuteness and the grotesque is explored in chapter 4, particularly with reference to the works of Aida Makoto.

Something becomes cute not necessarily because of a quality it has but because of a quality it lacks, 'a certain neediness and inability to stand alone'. (Harris 2000, 4)

> Because it aestheticizes unhappiness, helplessness, and deformity, it almost always involves an act of sadism on the part of its creator, who makes an unconscious

1-6. Sir John Tenniel, 1865 *Alice*
Disney. 1951 *Alice in Wonderland*
Zero games, 2001 *hajimete no rusuban* (first house sitter)
From Morikawa 2003, 106

> attempt to maim, hobble, and embarrass the thing he seeks to idolize.
> (Harris 2000, 5)

Kinsella argues that being cute meant behaving childlike, which 'involved an act of self-mutilation, posing with pigeon toes, pulling wide-eyed innocent expressions', for example. 'In cute culture, young people become popular according to their apparent weakness, dependence and inability, rather than because of their strengths and capabilities.' (Kinsella 1995, 237) For Harris too, the process of conveying cuteness to the viewer disempowers its objects, creating 'lovable inferiors', (Harris 2000, 4) and making them appear 'more ignorant and vulnerable than they really are.' (Harris 2000, 6)

Three illustrations based on Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* are presented by Morikawa Kaichirô as a series to highlight a powerful transformation. (Morikawa 2003, 106) (Ill.1-6) The first illustration is by Sir John Tenniel in 1865, the second is from the Disney animated film version *Alice in Wonderland* in 1951, and the third is from a Japanese computer game *hajimete no rusuban* (first house sitter) by Zero games in 2001. In his book Morikawa labels the illustrations Europe, America and Japan respectively, and argues just as Europe degenerated into America, so did America into Japan. (Morikawa 2004, 23) These illustrations can also be arranged by date, providing another illustration of the development of the cute aesthetic seen with the *Yonda?* Panda illustrations.

Plan of Chapters

This section highlights the key research questions, and outlines the material to be examined in each chapter.

Chapter 2 focuses on the works of contemporary artists who have engaged with cuteness in contemporary Japanese popular culture, and through interviews with them provides original research material. Murakami Takashi asks what powerful icons of the present day serve as the context for our art? Through an examination of Murakami's character *Mr. DOB*, for example, this chapter questions the relationship of cuteness to the process of commodification and the proliferation of characters like *Miffy* and *Hello Kitty*, and by including key secondary material this chapter questions whether cuteness is not merely something trivial but involving power play and gender role issues. An examination of *shôjo* culture includes issues of gender played out in the writings of Brian McVeigh and

Sharon Kinsella, and what has been described as a process of 'infantilization' which, according to a number of Japanese cultural theorists, has meant the term *shôjo* is now applicable to postmodern identity as a whole, and not restricted to young girls.

How Japanese contemporary artists have used cuteness to deconstruct traditional artistic values is examined in chapter 3. 'Super Flat', the exhibition curated by Murakami that began in Parco Gallery, Tokyo in 2000, included non-fine artists such as the animators Morimoto Kioji and Kanada Yoshinori, and Anno Hideaki. Murakami's concept of Super Flat represents an art historical perspective of Japanese *manga* and animation, which questions what happened in the cultural scene in Japan after the World War II, and what was born especially as a result of the influence of imported pop culture.

The relationship of cuteness to the erotic, particularly in the works of Murakami Takashi and Aida Makoto, are examined in chapter 4. Murakami's 1998 exhibition 'Ero Pop Christmas' featured erotic *manga* artist Machino Henmaru, and figure maker Bome, who Murakami had worked with to make life-sized sculptures. An investigation of Murakami's figure projects *Miss Ko*^{2} 1996, *Hiropon* 1997 and *My Lonesome Cowboy* 1998, is informed by an exploration into the subculture world of *otaku*, the obsessive *manga* and *anime* fans in Japan, including many who are devoted followers of erotic and grotesque *manga*. In particular how the cuteness in Japanese *ero manga* (adult comics) and *anime*, particularly *rorikon* (Lolita complex) *manga*, which conflicts with the often violent and pornographic content, represents a displacement of cuteness.

Chapter 5 explores the reasons underlying Sawaragi Noi's claim that 'monster', is one of the key words that capture the meaning of 'Tokyo Pop'. (Sawaragi 1999a, 70-78) In the *Melting DOB* series 1999, Murakami's character *Mr. DOB* mutates into a jagged-toothed monster, while Nara Yoshitomo's work also often includes a horror element in his typically cute figures. This chapter investigates the meaning of the transformation of cuteness into the grotesque, and questions whether this is representative of what has been referred to as postmodern schizophrenia.

The aim in chapter 6 is to investigate the association of cuteness with nostalgia, and question how this has informed the work of a generation of contemporary Japanese artists. 'The Doraemon' exhibition held at Sogô Museum in the Sogô department store in

Yokohama in 2003, celebrated the 25th anniversary of the television animation series *Doraemon*, and thirty artists contributed to the exhibition, including Nara Yoshitomo, and Murakami Takashi. In particular Nara Yoshitomo's works, which often include a horror element, are examined with regard to a confrontation with elements we might choose to forget.

Mori's work *Play with Me* 1994 is set in the electric appliance and computer equipment stores of Akihabara, an area of Tokyo famous for cheap electrical goods, which was at that time beginning to realign its focus towards computer software, games and DVDs. Through Mori Mariko's early works, chapter 7 investigates how contemporary art has questioned the cuteness represented in the virtual reality of computer games, and science-fiction *manga* and *anime*.

This thesis undertakes an interrogation of these themes and will examine areas where the key questions might intersect.

Cuteness: towards a definition

The 2001 second edition of the dictionary *Nihongo Daijiten*, first published by Shôgakukan in 1972, gives a detailed definition of the word '*kawaii*', including an etymological account, which gives a number of usage examples dating from the 15th century, and makes use of important early 17th century Japanese-Portuguese dictionaries. The *Daijiten* refers to five different meanings. Firstly, there is an emphasis on pity, and an air of arousing someone's pity; '*kawaii*' used to express sympathy, and feeling sorry for someone. A second meaning traced back to the beginning of the 19th century attaches '*kawaii*' to being attracted to a person, or something that is treasured and cherished; the desire to take care of a person. The third meaning refers to something that looks lovable, or pretty. A young woman, or child's face for example. The fourth meaning is some thing or shape that is pleasing, likable or little. This usage of '*kawaii*' to mean small and beautiful, particularly the emphasis on small size, can be traced back to 1813. A child's tiny hands are an example. The fifth meaning in the *Daijiten* is something insignificant, or sorrowful. It includes an element of contempt, insult. This is where the notion of powerlessness comes from, and there is a reference to the insignificance of people of low rank or status. The

Daijiten refers to the *Goshi*, a book of etymology, which also refers to meanings such as *hazukashii* (ashamed, embarrassed), and *samariga warui* (feel awkward).

Today's meaning and usage of '*kawaii*' has shifted, and has an expanded meaning compared to the English word 'cute'. *Kawaii* can be used to describe someone's face, or an object. It can also be used to refer to old people. *Kawaii* sometimes refers to the unbalanced features of a teddy bear, or the face of a baby. Matsui Midori also points out that the feeling of 'cute' is unbusinesslike, rude behaviour that is different from the rationality and efficiency of adult society, and in patriarchal authority, this is a word used in relation to women and children. (Matsui 1996a, 24-41)

Sharon Kinsella argues a new usage of the word '*kawaii*' started with high schoolgirls during the *maruiji* (round letters) craze, and refers to Yamane Kazuma's important research into this subject. (Kinsella 1995, 221) The cute style, she argues, began as 'an underground literary trend amongst young people who developed the habit of writing stylized childish letters to one another and then to themselves.' (Kinsella 1995, 224) This coincides with the start of Sanrio in 1971 and *Hello Kitty* in 1974. Shimamura Mari states 'rather than being another post-war value, the present meaning of kawaii has not been in existence for any longer than fifteen years.' (Shimamura 1991, 225)

By the 1980s *kawaii* style dominated Japanese popular culture. Kinsella refers to this period as 'a peak of saccharine intensity.' (Kinsella 1995, 220) While cuteness did in fact continue to expand after the 1980s, it was certainly a key period, and one of particular significance for the artists in this thesis. The word *kawaii* itself was by 1992 estimated by the monthly women's fashion magazine *CREA* published by Bungeishunjû, to be 'the most widely used, widely loved, habitual word in modern living Japanese.' (Quoted in Kinsella 1995, 221) In around 1995 cuteness also experienced a boom in *otaku* culture, particularly in *anime* and computer game characters.

Hello Kitty celebrated her 30th anniversary in 2004. Nostalgia is now an important factor, as the young girls of the 1980s become mothers. In Kinsella's research, in which she asked the question 'In what kinds of situations might you use the word kawaii?' she found themes dominated by childhood, and a childhood associated with innocence, and a naïve

unity with the world, and concludes that 'for cute fans, cute sentiments were all about the recovery of a childlike emotional and mental state.' (Kinsella 1995, 239)

Because of its ambiguity and what McVeigh terms its 'multivocality', it is very difficult to arrive at a definition of cuteness.

> Cuteness is a concept of great cultural ubiquity and is often used to characterize objects (toys, small things), persons (children, young girls, women), behaviour (certain words, facial expressions), an attitude (one's feelings toward a thing or person). Consequently attempts at defining it for methodological purposes are problematic. (McVeigh 1996, 293)

McVeigh also states that cuteness has the basic principles of having the features of a child, and the ability to arouse the protective instinct in others. To this he adds 'the desire of a cute person to want to be liked, which is accomplished by expressing weakness.' (McVeigh 1996, 295) McVeigh examines three areas specifically – how the people who use cuteness explain its meaning; how cuteness as a symbol derives meaning from its relationship with other symbols; and how people make use of cuteness in everyday life, i.e. the operational, practical and socio-political aspects of cuteness. What McVeigh calls the 'operational meaning of cute objects' concerns how people use a symbol to make other people do, think, or feel certain things. Having outlined a definition of cuteness, the following section will now examine the problematics of researching Japanese culture from a position outside Japan.

Japanese Popular Culture

A number of studies have looked at Japanese culture as it is exported to the West, particularly America, where Japanese *manga* and *anime* are becoming increasingly popular. Anne Allison, for example, refers to cuteness as Japan's 'millennial product'. (Allison 2004, 34)

> While the study of Japanese popular culture, like that of any nation's, is not an exclusively new undertaking, neither is its history all that long; perhaps more importantly, as a nation outside the West, the question of *Japan*'s popular culture inevitably invites the questions of origins, sources, influences and colonialisms both long-standing and otherwise. The enquiry in Japanese popular culture cannot be much older than the concept of the 'popular' or of 'culture', both words that in their contemporary contexts run parallel to discourses of the 'modern' and, behind them but never too far away, the 'West'. (Treat 1996b, 4)

Japan is now part of the global order, and therefore 'we' includes the Japanese. (Treat 1996b, 11)

John Whittier Treat's study of contemporary Japan brings to the critical forefront the problem of analysing the cultural history of Japan, from a seemingly objective point of view, raising the key issue of how to study Japan. (Treat 1996, 1-14)

> Someone may continue to see in, for example, the 1980s subculture of dancing Sunday rockers in Tokyo's Yoyogi Park a reiteration of Japan's group-orientated social traditions (Littleton 1985), but such explanations no longer, if they ever did, suffice to account for a set of fluid symbolic systems and practices that enable different groups to make various kinds of sense of their lives today. (Treat 1996b, 1)

As Treat states it is necessary to be sceptical whenever we think we see familiar patterns or values re-emerge in a culture that has been 'continuous' for reasons less historical than ideological.

In *Empire of Signs*, Roland Barthes insisted his was an imaginary Japan, and Japan is a 'fictive nation' in his text. (Barthes 1982, 3) Specifically nationalistic conceptualisations of culture and history are rejected by Barthes, as he incites 'the possibility of difference, of mutation, of a revolution in the propriety of symbolic systems'. (Barthes 1982, 3-4)

> Such a critical move would suspend the need to locate Japan in opposition to Western culture and therefore naturalise it as part of a mythological 'Orient'. Barthes is looking to put forward a representation of difference that yields a plurality of definitions and conceptual tools, and that avoids creating cultural stereotypes. Empire of Signs pushes back the traditional disciplinary boundaries of cultural history by showing its limitations. (Trifonas 2001, 49)

The problem of studying Japan from the position of the West, and avoiding accusations of Orientalism has been tackled in different ways in previous studies.

Taking into account the problematic issue of researching Japan from the West, this thesis takes the position of investigating contemporary Japanese popular culture as a scene of the postmodern. It is a position which has been employed in previous research, such as Masao Miyoshi and Harry Harootunian, who in *Postmodernism and Japan* also put forward a way of looking at Japan as a 'scene' or 'space' of postmodernism. 'Japan offers the occasion, in a way that may very well resist representation and narrativization, to examine the scene of this new imagery.' (Miyoshi and Harootunian 1989, xii) Karatani Kôjin, while also

referring to a 'new phase of capitalism' emblematic to Japan, (Karatani quoted in Miyoshi and Harootunian 1989, xv) in the round-table discussion with Jacques Derrida, and Asada Akira published in the *Asahi Journal* he raises this issue of employing Western theory, namely the possibility of deconstruction to Japan. (Asada, Derrida, & Karatani 1984, 6-14) This will be examined in further detail, particularly in relation to Japanese contemporary art's engagement with popular culture, in chapter 3.

Sawaragi Noi points out in the exhibition 'Ironic Fantasy - Another World by Five Contemporary Artists', that Murakami Takashi, Mori Mariko, and Nara Yoshitomo, partake in their creative work in and out of Japan. (Sawaragi 1996, n.p.) The objectivity that living and working outside Japan allows, was also referred to directly by Mori Mariko in my interview with her.

> Before I moved to New York, I was in London for 4 years, so altogether for five or six years I wasn't really living in Tokyo. When I came back and visited my family I was quite shocked about the whole thing, it was like a culture shock for me. I was able to see objectively, as an observer from the outside, rather than from the inside. I was able to look at it more objectively.
> (Mori interview 2004)

It is a key consideration to which Mori has referred to before, (Fujimori 1995, 50-55) and it suggests an advantage from being able to look at Japanese popular culture from a position somewhat outside it.

Having laid the foundations and introduced the key research questions, this thesis proceeds with a detailed description of the research.

Chapter 2 Commodification: cute consumerist signs and objects

A snapshot of a shop shutter in Harajuku, Tokyo, offers a quick take on the hyper-consumer scene of Japanese contemporary culture as Hokusai's *The Great Wave* is touched up, re-worked, Mount Fuji erupts, and smiling *Katô-chans* explode everywhere. (Ill.2-1) *Katô-chan*, a famous animated TV character in Japan, is a *sararîman*, what the Japanese call an average nine to five office worker, supports what is jokingly called a 'barcode' hairstyle, and is representative of the 'character goods' merchandising which is now a massive industry in Japan. Not just toys and stationery, but food, home appliances, life insurance, mortgages, and you can pay for it all with a *Hello Kitty* credit card. (Ill.2-2) Cute characters have spread into train stations and airports, banks and local government offices, even police stations.

Cuteness can be seen as constructing a sensibility rather than just reflecting it. Cuteness is everywhere, being repeatedly exposed to it to such an extent that it becomes instinctive and automatic, and because it operates on the level of the trivial and everyday it isn't questioned. Brian McVeigh argues cuteness can often disguise power since on the surface it appears harmless: it is the very 'innocuousness' of *Hello Kitty* that conceals her power. (McVeigh 2000, 226) Although cuteness is often trivialised and this has lead to a lack of serious research, the suggestion is that something significant is being concealed. This chapter aims to build a theoretical foundation upon which the research is based by reviewing the relevant literature to identify issues which have not been answered by previous research.

The main research focus of this chapter is to examine how Japanese contemporary art has commented on this proliferation of cuteness in Japanese popular culture and what insights they offer to enable a clearer understanding of cuteness in Japanese popular culture and how it operates in Japanese society. Murakami Takashi puts forward the question 'What powerful icons of the present day serve as the context for our art?' (Murakami 2001a, 132) Murakami's character *Mr. DOB*, a cross between the Japanese character *Doraemon* and *Mickey Mouse*, (Ill.2-3) features in a great number of Murakami's paintings, sculptures, balloons, and merchandising, appearing on T-shirts, key rings, stickers and badges, and represents an enquiry into the 'secret of market survival', or the 'universality' of characters

2-1. Harajuku Shutter Artist, 1998
Shop shutter on Takeshita Dôri, Harajuku, Tokyo
Photo the author

2-2. *Hello Kitty*, 2000
Visa credit card

2-3. Murakami Takashi, 1998
Blue
Acrylic on canvas
40 x 40 x 4 cm
Collection Roderic Steincamp, New York

like *Mickey Mouse*, *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Doraemon*, *Miffy*, *Hello Kitty*, even the Hong Kong made rip-offs. The implementation and analysis of this was the first goal of the DOB project. (Murakami 2001a, 132)

In 1996 Murakami launched the Hiropon Factory in Asaka, Saitama, where he created his own works and 'produced' a number of young artists. The exhibition 'Tokyo Pop,' at Hiratsuka Museum of Art in the same year, included Murakami along with Aida Makoto, Mori Mariko and Nara Yoshitomo. Matsui Midori advances the argument that this is a response to the rapid transformation of Japan into a post-industrial society since the 1970s and the emergence of a mass consumer culture nationwide, and that the exhibition 'Tokyo Pop' gave powerful representation to the 'sense of anxiety' caused by this situation. (Matsui 1997, 10)

1996 was also the year Jean Baudrillard published his article 'Disney World Company', in which he states that the new world order is in Disney mode. (Baudrillard 1996, 169-173) Baudrillard argues Disney has erased the real by turning it into a three-dimensional virtual image with no depth, and that 'Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real.' (Baudrillard 1983, 25) Disneyland is the archetypal simulacrum and a model of the post-modern; the real is no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and simulation. Karatani Kôjin even asserts that contemporary Japanese capitalism has gone 'beyond even Baudrillard's consumer society, into some other 'extremely abnormal situation.' (Karatani quoted in Ivy 1989, 42)

American popular culture, especially Disney has been a key influence on Japanese popular culture, particularly with regard to *manga* and *anime*. The rise of cuteness in Japan was in part engendered by the *manga* tradition in the post-war period, and the phenomenal success of the comics medium as a source of public entertainment encouraged the aesthetical appreciation of the 'cute' revolution. (Shiokawa 1999, 97) *Shôjo* manga in particular played an important role in the rise of the popularity of cuteness in the post-war period. An illustration by Macoto provides an example of this. (Ill.2-4)

> The emergence of *shôjo manga*, or girls comics, is the first and foremost contributor to the present-day mass consumption of anything 'cute.' (Shiokawa 1999, 99)

2-4. Macoto, 1961
Puchi ra magazine cover May 1961

Anne Allison also argues that cuteness, a powerful theme in contemporary Japanese character merchandising, developed out of the *shôjo* culture of the 1970s. (Allison 2004, 40)

Contemporary images of *shôjo* in works by Aida Makoto allude to the 1990s discourse of *shôjo*, which centred on passivity, consumerism, commodification, and moral and ethical emptiness, as *shôjo* became a model of the Japanese nation. Cuteness became equated with consumption itself and the pursuit of something that dislodges the heaviness and constraints of modern life.

> In high-culture artistic production 'the girl' has often functioned as a telegraphic site for society's, or the (male) artist's struggle with important issues of modernity. In the 1980s and 1990s in Japan, the image of the *shôjo* played this role. (Orbaugh 2003, 206)

The Japanese 'culture of cute' represents a unique blend of postmodern desire and infantile affection. (Belson and Bremner 2004, 6) McVeigh argues that communicated through commercialisation and commodification, cute things become 'objectified sentiment, commenting on and supporting a normative discourse about gender definitions', and that cuteness is tied up with a notion of the 'ideal woman.' (McVeigh 1996, 308) Sharon Kinsella however, particularly objects to this assertion and contrary to McVeigh highlights the rebellious nature of *shôjo* and their challenge to exactly this kind of gender stereotype. (Kinsella 1996) Kinsella's 'Comments on McVeigh', (Kinsella 1997, 383-385) and McVeigh's 'Reply to Kinsella' (McVeigh 1997, 385-387) in the *Journal of Material Culture*, provides a running dialogue, where McVeigh focuses on the controlling nature of cuteness, Kinsella on its rebellion against control. Both studies offer significant insights, but also have issues that need challenging, which will become apparent in this chapter.

A number of studies have questioned whether the dissemination of cuteness and the spread of *shôjo* culture represents a process of 'infantilization'.

> Cuteness, in this sense, is childish, and its appeal has increasingly spread to all elements of the Japanese population – men as well as women, boys as well as girls – so that, in Japan today, it is no longer confined to the shôjo alone. (Allison 2004, 40)

Horikiri Naoto also questions whether the term *shôjo* is no longer confined to just young girls.

> I wonder if we men shouldn't now think of ourselves as 'shôjo', given our compulsory and excessive consumerism, a consumerism that in recent years afflicts us like sleepwalking... The 'shôjo', that new human species born of modern commodification, has today commodified everything and everyone. (Horikiri quoted in Treat 1996, 281)

Cuteness in this way becomes representative of the postmodern scene in Japan, and this chapter, by including key secondary material which recognises that cuteness as not merely something trivial but involving power play and gender role issues, and issues of 'infantilization', aims to examine how contemporary Japanese artists have responded to this, and provide original research through interviews with them.

A Dissemination of Cuteness

Murakami's character *Mr. DOB* has been a key motif in Murakami's work since his appearance in the exhibition entitled 'A Romantic Evening' at the Gallery Cellar, Nagoya in 1993. (Murakami 1994, 49) The name 'DOB' has specific referents in Japanese culture. Initially a reference to the habit of adding suffixes to *manga* series, such as *Dragonball Z* and *Dragonball GT*, 'DOB' derives from the phrase '*dobjite, dobjite*' (a muddled pronunciation of the Japanese *doshite*, meaning 'why') from the 1970s *manga* and television *anime Inakappe Taishô* (Country Bumpkin) by Kawasaki Noboru. (Murakami 2001c, 132) (Ill.2-5)

> Although he hails from the world of marketing, DOB does not promote any product, except perhaps Murakami. DOB is a disengaged signifier, an ever-changing symbol of all the other artificially constructed characters that sell merchandise. (Cruz 1999, 17)

Mr. DOB, deliberately cute in the typical style of Japanese characters, represents an engagement with popular culture within contemporary Japanese art.

The use of marketing strategies by Murakami is evident in his various balloon works featuring *Mr. DOB*, which were inspired from the huge balloons used to promote *Doraemon* films, with their high impact for very low costs. (Ill.2-6) Murakami's installation *Wink* 2001, for example, was on show in New York for one month at Grand Central Station in the Vanderbilt Hall, a former waiting room of Beaux-Arts splendour, was seen by the 500,000 people per day that pass through it. (Rubinstein 2001, 111) Comprising of three huge helium filled balloons, two sixteen feet in diameter, another

2-5. Kawasaki Noboru, 1976
Inakappetaishô (The Country Bumpkin)
Manga cover

2-6. Murakami Takashi, 1994
Mr. DOB
Balloon
Photo Kyoto, October 1994
From Murakami 1999b, 50

twenty-six feet high, held in place by thin wires, they floated thirty feet in the air. (Ill.2-7) It was a great marketing scheme for his exhibition in Marianne Boesky Gallery, which was opening at the same time in New York.

Mr. DOB also reflects Murakami's more radical ambivalences towards fine art traditions. Writing DOB in the Roman alphabet, rather than Japanese, is a reference to the popularity of using English at that time, which extended to Japanese artists who Murakami felt, without fully understanding the words they were using, and misspelling words, were imitating language art by Western artists such as Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger, who were popular in Japan at that time. (Murakami 2001a, 132) Critical of this superficial use of English to impress, and be fashionable, *Mr. DOB* is 'an imitation of language art using not difficult text but a rather silly slogan.' (Murakami quoted in Kelmachter 2002, 3)

> Of course, the Japanese contemporary art scene went right along with the boom, making me even madder. It even spread to the critics responsible for evaluating the art. I think that, in part, DOB was my attempt to crush that art scene I despised. (Murakami 2001a, 132)

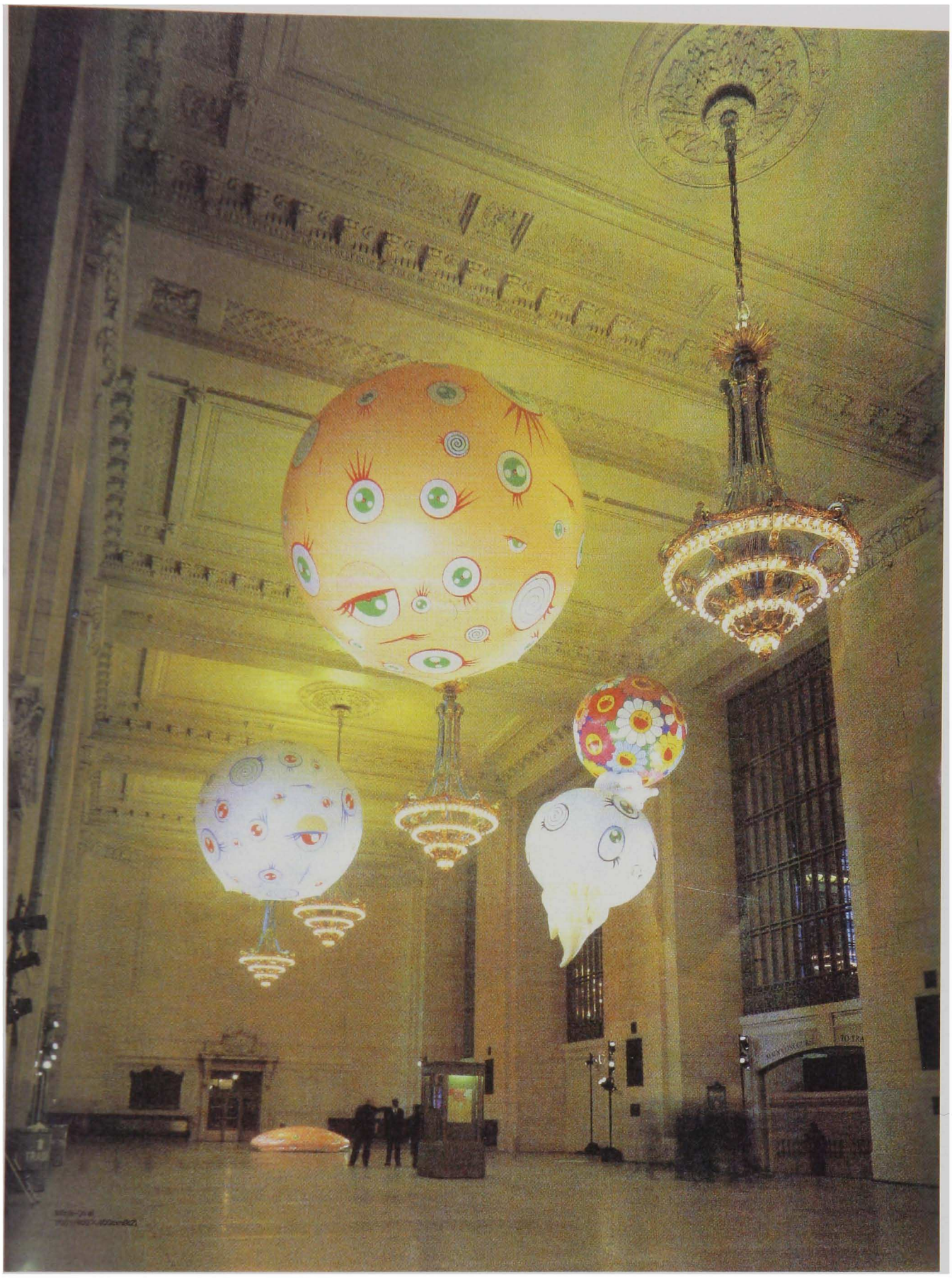
The importance of cuteness in contemporary art in its double-stance towards fine art institutions, and the effacement of key boundaries or separations will be examined in more detail in chapter 3.

The title '*Wink*' echoes the winking eye in Richard Hamilton's work *$he* (1958- 61), indicating a certain teasing, a knowing sign, and a classic pop statement that resonates with Marx's notion of commodities casting 'flirtatious glances at the buyers.' (Marx 1976, 202)

> Murakami possesses the ability to exploit commodities or strategies of consumer society, to reflect the spiritual emptiness at its core, or to capture the drift of amorphous desire. (Matsui 1994, 38)

Murakami's character *Mr. DOB* is an enquiry into how consumer goods take on an irresistible charge. As Baudrillard argues, it is not so much the commodities themselves but the myths they stand for. (Baudrillard 1998)

The characters for the character goods so popular in Japan come from a variety of backgrounds. Most characters have their roots in *manga*, animated television series and movies. *Doraemon* for example, created by Fujimoto Hiroshi and Abiko Motoo under the pen name Fujiko F. Fujio, *Doraemon* first appeared in 1970 in the monthly children's

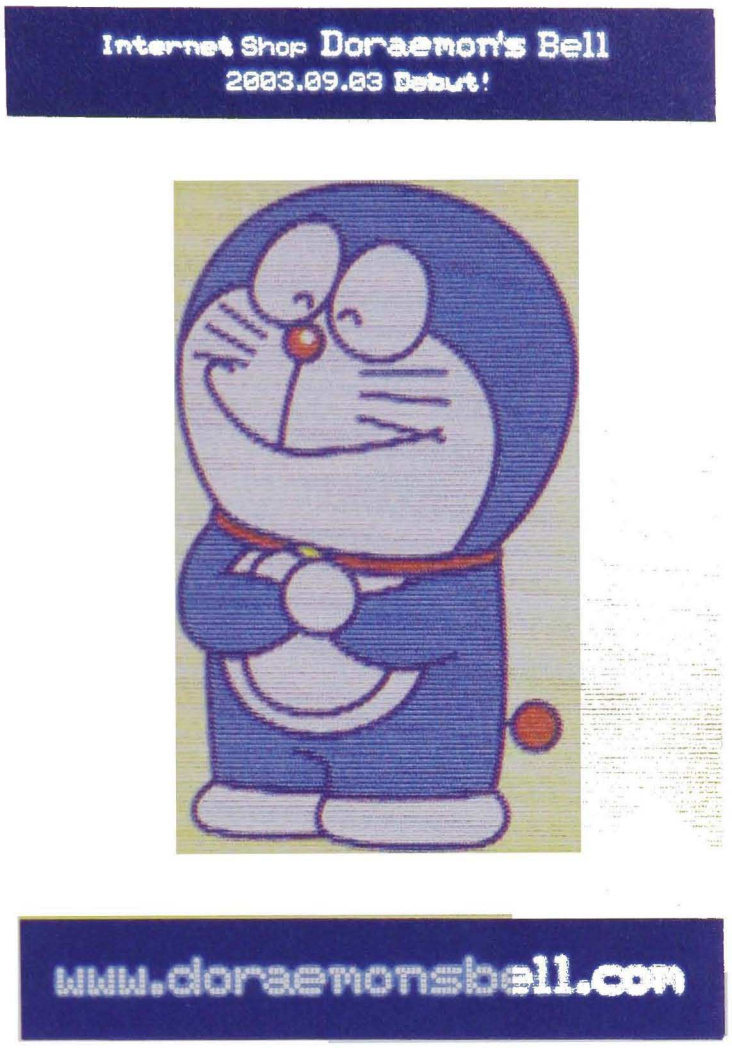


2-7. Murakami Takashi, 2001
Wink
Installation Grand Central Station, New York
3 helium filled balloons, 2 fibreglass and mirror floor works
Photo Rob Wilson
Metropolitan Transit Authority Arts for Transit and Creative Time, New York

magazine *Coro Coro Comic*. (Ill.2-8) By 1996 the 46 volume paperback series had sold over 100 million copies. (Shiraishi 2000) In 1978 TV Asahi began an animated version, which played throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Character merchandise featuring *Doraemon* was, and still is, big business in Japan, with toys, stickers, food, stationary, an endless line of products all featuring *Doraemon* characters.

Other characters not derived from *manga* but specifically created for promotion and advertising of certain companies, brand names and products, work to facilitate product recognition and add friendly and happy post-wars to the 20th century commodity culture. *Hello Kitty*, for example, can be distinguished from the products of conventional character merchandising based on existing narrative media such as animated TV series, films, video games, and *manga*. Instead, these character-icons are largely lacking in conventional character definition and circulate independently of any forms of dominant narrative created by the producers. This emptiness resurfaces with Saitô Tamaki's comparison of Japanese characters to Disney characters later in this chapter. *Hello Kitty* is pure product rather than having first appeared in a *manga* or comic book, and exemplifies Baudrillard's notion of the simulacrum, the same commodified image copied with no original, exhibiting 'the smooth operational surface of communication.' (Baudrillard 1983b, 127) This new depthlessness, this superficiality, has according to Fredric Jameson, become a general characteristic of the late 20th century cultural consumption, above all, pleasure taken from the surface. (Jameson 1991)

Sanrio started *Hello Kitty* in 1974 and became a pioneer in the marketing of cuteness in Japan. *Hello Kitty* demonstrates the sheer sales power of cute, and establishing cuteness as a key element in the marketplace. There is now a Sanrio theme park in Japan called *Puroland*, and a number of *Hello Kitty* themed *karaoke* lounges and hotels. Thousands of *Hello Kitty* products are on the market, with hundreds of new items released each month, advertised in her own magazine *Kitty Goods*. *Hello Kitty* has grown into a national icon. The original inspiration though, came from America. President and CEO of Sanrio, Tsuji Shintarô was a fan of Charles Schulz, whom he met in 1970, and eventually won the license to sell and market goods featuring *Snoopy*. (Belson and Bremner 2004, 40) Joyce C. Hall founder of Hallmark cards was also an influence, while the idea for a cat, which was designed by Shimizu Yûko, came from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*.



2-8. doraemon'sbell.com, 2002
Internet shop flier

2-9. *Girlie*, February 2002
Magazine cover featuring *My Melody*

(Belson and Bremner 2004, 70) The influence of American popular culture, particularly Disney is extremely important. From her first appearance in 1974, *Hello Kitty* was meant as a global product, a Japanese feline challenge to the American rodent, *Mickey Mouse*. Murakami refers to the communicative role of characters, characters acting as an interface for personal relations, like a mask.

> In Japan, communication is about appearances and surfaces. We use cuteness and formality to disguise what we really want to say. My work looks at the other side of that cuteness. (Murakami quoted in Gomez 1999, 18)

Japan's character culture is one of communication design. President and CEO of Sanrio, Tsuji's initial idea of starting Sanrio in 1960 was as a 'social communication' business, and as Ken Belson and Brian Bremner argue, character products are now circulated in variously communicative ways and so can be considered 'cultural texts'. (Belson and Bremner 2004)

Mori Mariko also alluded to this aspect of characters in my interview with her.

> She has no mouth, but also no mask. She doesn't have an expression. It's your mind that reads what her feelings are. Maybe, historically that's something Japanese people do get attracted to. (Mori interview 2004)

Sawaragi had previously singled out cuteness as what he called 'a very dangerous tendency of Japanese society.' (Sawaragi 1992, 75)

Hello Kitty and other character goods become companions who engage in a rebounded dependency, calling upon others' care and protection, even while providing care and protection for their caregivers. The fact that this relationship is a commodity itself, developed within a capitalistic framework does not bother its consumers. Advertisers have learned that consumers will 'adopt' products that they create, and often in their packaging alone demonstrate an aura of motherlessness, ostracism, and melancholy, 'the silent desperation of the lost puppy dog clamouring to be befriended – namely to be bought.' (Harris 2000, 5) An illustration of the popular Sanrio character *My Melody* is an example. (Ill.2-9) Lori Merish also argues that 'the cute always in some sense represents a commodity in search of its mother, and is constructed to generate maternal desire.' (Merish 1996, 186) Commodity desire and maternal emotion become confused as cute generates an aesthetic response in a 'commercial structure of feminine consumer empathy.' (Merish 1996, 187) As maternal sentiments are transferred to commodities, the aesthetic of

cuteness 'courts consumer empathy, generating a structure of emotional response that assimilates consumption into the logic of adoption.' (Merish 1996, 187)

> The infantile characteristics, nature's strategy for eliciting a caring response – are used as a foil to engage the spectator's emotions and present the insidious relationship between power and powerlessness with reference to this structural contrast. (Brehm 2002, 17)

McVeigh similarly argues that cuteness, as it permeates the world of *Hello Kitty* and other character goods, points to the fundamental rationalities of the helpless and helper, the kept and the keeper, the dependent and the dependable. Cuteness always to some extent aestheticises powerlessness. (McVeigh 1996)

Cuteness is used by banks to counter the negative effects of the growing rate of automation in the banking industry, and to add some emotional appeal to depersonalized banking transactions. *Daiichi Kangyô Bank*, for example, used *Hello Kitty* images in their front windows. (Ill.2-10) and to promote mortgages and loans. (Ill.2-11) *Que-chan* a Chihuahua used by Aiful Corporation in a series of advertisements, was a huge success, and became a popular character in its own right. (Ill.2-12) This popularity lead to the release of merchandising products, including a book and CD. In the television commercial evocatively it is an older man, the girl's father, who succumbs to the cuteness of the Chihuahua, first in the pet shop window, and then dressed in a wedding suit. (Ill.2-13)

The abundance of the cute aesthetic, according to Kinsella, is a reaction to the dehumanizing atmosphere of corporate culture, in Japan's high-tech, de-personalized condition of postmodernity. (Kinsella 1995, 228) A newspaper article on the rise of popularity of *Winnie the Pooh* in Japan, quotes recent statistics to show that in Japan Christopher Robin's bear is now more popular than *Mickey Mouse* and *Pokemon*. (Watts 2002, 7) Perhaps *Pooh* seems to fit Japan right now, making people feel at ease in troubled times. He has a kind of soothing quality that people like. Whereas *Pooh* is comfortably imperfect, Mickey is exhaustingly energetic and strong willed. (Watts 2002, 7) Anne Allison also puts forward the argument that cute characters can have a healing effect, relieving loneliness and reducing stress, highlighting a warm cheer-me-up atmosphere that cute style gives products. (Allison 2004, 46) What capitalist production processes de-personalize, the good cute design re-personalizes. Allison questions whether consumption of lots of cute style goods with powerful emotion-inducing properties could ironically

2-10. *Daiichi Kangyô Bank*, 1998
Promotion featuring *Hello Kitty*, Harajuku, Tokyo
Photo the author

2-11. *Daiichi Kangyô Bank*, 1998
Loan pamphlet featuring *Hello Kitty*

2-12. *Aiful* corporation, 2003
Tissue promotion featuring *Que-chan*

2-13. *Aiful* corporation, 2003
Tissue promotion featuring *Que-chan*

disguise and compensate for the very alienation of individuals in contemporary society. In consuming cuteness, the yearning to be comforted and soothed is certainly a key aspect. There is also an element of childhood nostalgia. Cuteness becomes connected to children through nostalgia even when it is consumed by adults. The issue of childhood nostalgia will be examined in more detail in chapter 6.

Nara's work draws on a sign-like, shorthand language of images with which 20th century children's book illustrations were produced.

> All his faces include so-called 'baby schema', certain key stimuli in the physiognomy of the young – whether human or animal – that trigger an instinct for brood care behaviour: spherical head shapes, pudgy cheeks, high foreheads and disproportionately large eyes with underdeveloped mouths and noses. (Trescher 2001, 15)

The graphic effect of the surface and the signal-like sign character taken to the extreme leave an endless amount of background space for the fantasy of the child as well as the adult viewer. This aspect of Nara's art is obviously and essentially indebted to picture books by Dick Bruna. (Trescher 2001, 10)

In the same year as the 'Tokyo Pop' exhibition, Nara Yoshitomo's solo exhibition 'Lullaby Supermarket' in Germany and Japan featured figures of dogs and little girls with a certain sweetness on the surface, and have been compared with the swollen heads of the characters in Charles M. Schulz's cartoon *Peanuts*.

> There is the perfect, smooth outer skin of the sculptures, the bright bonbon colours of the paintings – mint green, cherry red, plum blue. They are cute embodiments of infantilism in their chubby-cheeked plumpness.
> (Trescher 2001, 17)

There has been an emphasis on this kitsch childish cartoon element in most reviews of Nara's work, which often end up questioning whether it is in fact art. This ignores important issues in Nara's work, which are made apparent in chapter 3.

Nara often incorporates animals in his work, particularly dogs. Children also often appear dressed in animal costumes in a similar way to *Hello Kitty* who sometimes wears various teddy bear outfits. Nara also highlights this as a part of his work, stating that the dog is a symbol of the human. It is 'in need of protection, dependent on its master, but has its own

will and can be clever as well.' (Trescher 2001b, 105) A common and important element in cute images is animals.

> Anthropomorphism is to a large extent *the* rhetorical strategy of children's books, which often generate their narratives from a kind of animal transvestism in which dogs, cats, bears, and pigs have the clothing and demeanour of human beings. (Harris 2000, 11)

As pets they require loving affection from people. To be cute triggers a sympathetic response in another, leading to an emotional involvement. For Harris there is a 'narcissism of cuteness', that is evident in the way that the aesthetic ascribes human attributes to animals. (Harris 2000, 11) Harris describes how cuteness exaggerates 'the vast discrepancies of power between the sturdy adult and the enfeebled and susceptible child.' (Harris 2000, 11) Kinsella too points to cuteness as a weakness, and 'an inability to deal with everyday life'. (Kinsella 1995, 239) McVeigh also stresses the focus on powerlessness, whether seen in infants, small animals, or pretty but defenceless females, which leads to empathy. (McVeigh 1996, 301) McVeigh concludes that cuteness can be condensed to the 'controllable/controlled and controlling/controller'. (McVeigh 1996, 296)

Murakami's deployment of cute images, Matsui argues, allowed him to mimic and expose how political hegemony was consolidated in Japan: through seduction, and by 'innocent' immersion into the emotional, national totality. (Matsui 1996, 69)

> In Japan we have many cute objects, cute styles of art, which have deep roots in our postwar parliamentary monarchy... The postwar emperor Hirohito was popular among the people as a cute, old man. In one sense this cuteness was neutral, in another, it was controlling. Couldn't one call this 'rule by cuteness' rather than 'rule by power'? It brings to mind a feminine way of controlling; cute objects and cute art actually do not have any relationship with the context of feminism, but they reflect the oppression of individualism under the emperor in postwar democracy. (Sawaragi 1992, 75)

Sympathetic to these artists Sawaragi supported the new artistic method which 'parodically simulated the icons and functions of consumer society, disrupting its rule from within its system.' (Matsui 1996b, 124)

In Sawaragi's essay '*Roripoppu - sono saishôgen no seimei*' (Lollipop: the Minimalist Life), he used the term 'simulationism' to represent the new critical tendency among contemporary artists. (Sawaragi 1992b, 86-92) Simulationism was also the subject of his book *Simulationism* 1991. Simulation is also a key word in the writings of Baudrillard who

uses it to describe a new model of reality created by the revolution in communications, which has succeeded earlier 'orders of simulacra' employing other forms of semblance, the Renaissance 'copy' for example. (Baudrillard 1983) Baudrillard refers to kitsch as an example of an 'aesthetics of simulation'. (Baudrillard 1998, 111) Sawaragi applauded Murakami Takashi as one of the 'Simulationists' critically reflecting Japanese consumer culture and this unconscious attraction to cute objects, in which he grouped Murakami, Tarô Chiezô and Yanagi Yukinori as part of what he termed 'Neo Pop'. (Sawaragi 1992b) Sawaragi praised their method of incorporating the ambiguous aspects of cuteness in their works in order to expose the way in which Japanese power deploys cuteness as a weapon, and saw it as a sign of the artists' commitment to 'the possibility of effecting a 'miniscule' yet powerful protest against homogenizing institutions.' (Matsui 1996b, 124)

The Neo Pop strategy, Sawaragi argued, resisted this invisible rule of cuteness by deliberately adopting the semblance to cute consumer products. Its final aim was to 'demythologize their charm through sarcastic modification.' (Matsui 1994, 35) In Sawaragi's article, the title 'LolliPop' is short for 'Lolita Pop', insisting on a connection with *rorikon* (Lolita Complex) *manga* and *anime*, and the *otaku* subculture. This is examined in chapter 4 in the context of the exhibition 'Ero Pop' in 1998. (Sawaragi 1992b, 86-92)

The notion of political power play being played out in cuteness can be found in McVeigh's essay 'How Hello Kitty Commodifies the Cute, Cool and Camp: "Consumutopia" versus "Control" in Japan', (McVeigh 2000, 225-245) which followed his earlier essay in the *Journal of Material Culture*. (McVeigh 1996, 291-312) McVeigh argues that the everyday aesthetics of cuteness that permeate all aspects of Japanese culture are a 'complex, paradoxical commentary on sociopolitical relations'. (McVeigh 1996, 308) The three main normative themes underlying cuteness, according to McVeigh are hierarchy, obedience and empathy. Cuteness, he argues, reinforces vertical power relations, and the hierarchical nature of Japanese society in general, male/female relations particularly, but also master/student, junior/senior, parent/child.

> Cuteness communicates power relations and power play, effectively combining weakness, submissiveness and humility with influence, domination and control. It merges meekness, admiration and attachment with benevolence, tenderness and sympathy. (McVeigh 1996, 291)

McVeigh concludes that cuteness can be condensed to two key concepts: powerlessness and power.

McVeigh also refers to the concept of *amaeru*, 'to solicit the indulgence of another', a word that is usually used to refer to a child's relationship with its parents. (McVeigh 1996, 299) McVeigh refers to the psychoanalyst Doi Takeo's *Amae no kôzô* 1971, and the translated work *Anatomy of Dependence* 1973, and his argument that the desire to look cute is a typical expression of *amaeru*. (McVeigh 1996, 299) Ian Buruma had also highlighted Doi's concepts of *amaeru* in his study of Japan.

> Children learn that a show of passive dependence is the best way to get favors as well as affection. There is a verb for this in Japanese: *amaeru*, translated in the dictionary as 'to presume upon another's love; to play the baby'. According to the psychiatrist Doi Takeo this is the main key to understanding the Japanese personality. (Buruma 1984, 21)

McVeigh's arguments seem to link the quite recent trend of cuteness with much older traditional concepts of Japanese society, and this is an aspect that Kinsella uses to critique his conclusions. Kinsella criticizes McVeigh for ignoring the whole wave of new mainstream scholars who have critiqued the old concepts of hierarchy, obedience and control. McVeigh's published response is to state that he doesn't believe cuteness is an essentialist element of Japanese culture, nor are 'hierarchy' or 'obedience', but merely describes the link between them and an everyday aesthetic that has become commodified.

Kinsella's research is more focussed on the gender issue, highlighting a cuteness tied to a female resistance, while McVeigh highlights the subjugating force of cuteness in the 'ideal woman' image. Each raises important questions of the limitations of the other's research into cuteness. By taking into consideration parts from both analyses of cuteness, while maintaining the possibility for both to be simultaneously in operation, it is possible to extend and make a contribution to this field. One of the important arguments of this thesis, is that the dissemination and proliferation of cuteness is due to it being so easily and effectively appropriated. The simplicity of cute images allows multiple meanings to be projected on to them.

A cute cut-out picture of *Kewpee* wearing a frilly blue dress, and a pink apron, which has written on it '*Beigun kichi iranai*' (we don't need the US bases), is being used as a banner

2-14. *Time* magazine, February 1997
Okinawa protest featuring *Kewpee*
Photo Hatano Masaharu

in a demonstration against the presence of American military bases in Okinawa, and is the subject of a photograph published in *Time* magazine in 1997. (Ill.2-14) This image of cuteness is being used to get sympathy and support, by giving the demonstrators an air of vulnerability and powerlessness in their confrontation with the powerful American military. It also implicitly refers to the infamous rape of a young schoolgirl by American soldiers. In March 1996 three U.S. servicemen were convicted in the kidnapping and rape of a twelve-year-old Okinawa girl in 1995 and sentenced to up to seven years in a Japanese prison. The verdict followed months of protests against the U.S. military presence in Okinawa. Even as testimony was being heard, record numbers of Okinawans protested, demanding the withdrawal of the 27,000 American troops on the island.

Kewpee, originally a toy in 1914, was in 1922 adopted by Q.P. Corporation, at that time a fish cannery, as their company logo. It was also Japan Industrial Bank's mascot, and is now one of the oldest and most universally recognized characters in Japan, and featured in Majima Ryôichi's work *Manma* 1996, exhibited in the 'Tokyo Pop' exhibition. The illustration in *Time* on the one hand seems to support McVeigh's arguments regarding *amaeru*, but on the other, the fact that it shows a group of quite aged women playing out an old issue with America, also seems to position that argument with a previous generation, as Kinsella suggests.

The exhibition 'Ironic Fantasy - Another World by Five Contemporary Artists' at Miyagi Museum 1996, Sawaragi argues, is shaped by the factor of 'generation', and a certain frame of time in Japan. (Sawaragi 1996, n.p.) This 'frame of time', Sawaragi argues, can be said to be the period under total American influence. He also refers to the importance of the economic environment of the 1980s in Japan as a time when a highly developed consumption culture emerged, (Sawaragi 1996, n.p.) and this will be examined in chapter 4.

American Impact

Mr DOB is 'deliberately cute and silly looking in the typical big-eyed style of Japanese cartoon characters,' and derived from Murakami's efforts to find an image or concept that was 'originally Japanese', although he later realized that this marketing technique, of using promotional characters actually originated in America. (Cruz 1999, 16) This highlights the influence and importance of Western culture in Japan. Jeff Fleming even goes as far to say

that Japanese popular culture is so heavily influenced by the West that it can be called a 'merging of Western and Japanese cultural entities'. (Fleming 2001, 15) *Mr DOB* is a hybrid of now typical Japanese characters, and American cartoon predecessors such as *Mickey Mouse* and *Mighty Mouse*.

Mr DOB is not only a symbol of *anime* culture, but of the sensibility that is characterized by an envy of and competitiveness towards American popular culture, Japan at once seduced and intimidated by an Americanised vision of modernity.

> The red, white and blue of *Mr. DOB* hints at a convoluted chain of events that begins with the American occupation of Japan after World War II, the introduction of American (chiefly Disney) cartoons to Japan, the Japanese assimilation of American cartoon styles into their own distinctive cartoon culture, the continuing westernization of Japan into the 1980s and 1990s (including a continued, some would say ominous, presence of Disney in Japan and elsewhere), and the reintroduction of cartoon-based imagery into art by Murakami in a manner similar to American Pop artists of the 1960s. (Darling 2001, 66)

Early Disney animation and cartoons had an important influence on Japanese *manga* artists. *Mickey Mouse*, and *Felix the Cat* became popular in the 1930s, but it was in a post-war Japan rebuilding its demilitarized industries during the occupation period (1945-52), that Disney's influence was really felt. Early television in Japan showed American cartoons such as *Popeye*, *Mighty Mouse* and *Woody Woodpecker*. Tezuka Osamu, Japan's most famous *manga* artist, was initially influenced by Disney, and is often referred to as the 'Walt Disney of Japan'.

The world of *anime* is a world of impotence, according to Murakami, 'behind the flashy titillation of *anime* lies the shadow of Japan's trauma after the defeat of the Pacific War,' he states, but the Japanese preference for cuteness also reflects a wish for the birth of a new life. The notion of *kawaii* is extremely positive. (Murakami 2001b, 58-66)

> Of course, it is also influenced by American culture imported after the War. However, we must not forget that this desire for the birth of new characters has grown out of this great trauma. (Murakami 2000b, 11)

A souvenir from Hiroshima, which shows the burnt-out dome of the atomic blast site behind cute chicks hatching from 'peace eggs', illustrates how the use of cuteness might be tied up with the traumatic memory of World War II. (Ill.2-15) Matsui argues that

2-15. *heiwa no tamago* (Peace eggs), 2003
Milk almonds souvenir from Hiroshima

Murakami and others were confronting their historical shame and expressing themselves in crisis, split between the West and Japan, fine art and subculture, with sarcastic humour. *Mr DOB* 'cheekily claimed Murakami's overcoming of the Japanese animators' inferiority complex toward Disney.' (Matsui 1997, 110)

Murakami makes a connection between the proliferation of cuteness and the war in my interview with him, when I questioned him about the popularity of cuteness in Japan.

> I think the roots of where cute culture came are the atomic bomb…I think that what is called Japanese culture is after all impotent. How should I say, we don't believe in building up nation to nation relations aggressively, or things like that, we really don't believe in the so called structure that is nation. European countries, China and Korea all believe in the concept of nation. We fundamentally cannot believe in our country. The reason is in the end because there were the atomic bombs, then many things were rebuilt by America, really we were organized in a comfortable way. (Murakami interview 2004)

This issue is raised again in Murakami's exhibition 'Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture' at the Japan Society, New York, in 2005, where 'Little Boy' is a reference to the codename for the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945, while the catalogue contained a copy of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution which was drafted by America and promulgated in 1946 and outlines the renunciation of war. The issue of Japanese cultural impotency is further examined in chapter 4.

The police's mascot is called *Pipo-kun*, a cheerful mouse-like character that adorns *kôban*s (police boxes) throughout Japan, various police notices, street signs and public safety campaigns. (Ill.2-16) The numbers shown in the sign below *Pipo-kun* in this illustration refer to the number of deaths and casualties from traffic accidents in the vicinity. Life size *Pipo-kun*s have been seen handing out leaflets warning passengers about molesters on trains. (McVeigh 1996, 310) '*Pipo pipo*' is the sound of a police siren in Japanese, as it would be written in *manga*. In my interview with Aida, when I questioned him about *Pipo-kun* and the proliferation of cuteness in Japan, he also referred to the effects of defeat in World War II.

> Basically, it has been continuing since losing the Pacific War. A father's so called dignity has run out in Japan, don't you think? The police's *Pipo-kun* is surely very unusual within a global context. But it is also an embarrassing side of Japan. However, there is also a sense that it seems unnatural for a father to have a macho dignity, I sense that the dignity of the army or the police has been maintained only because they are straining to keep up the dignity. (Aida interview 2004)

2-16. Omotesandô *Koban* (Police box), 1999
Sign featuring *Pipo-kun*
Photo the author

This represents a new interpretation of the role cuteness plays in Japanese popular culture uncovered by Japanese artists.

Aida's argument, that since Japan lost the war they have been forced to show a side of themselves that they hadn't wanted to show, without the macho façade that America and Europe still have, provides a key insight.

> With regard to having lost the war, in one way, more than countries that won, I think we became normal. We returned to our true selves, that we hadn't wanted to show anyone. (Aida interview 2004)

Aida implies that it is a good thing to reveal this truer side, and that macho pretence doesn't really sit well with present cultural trends, while also alluding to an Oedipal relation, the 'fatherly power' of America, which will be examined in more detail in chapter 6. In Aida's series of paintings entitled *Sensôga Returns* (War Picture Returns) 1995-6, for example, where Aida reflects on not the past that was the War, but the present age in which we live.

Questioning Mori Mariko about the influence of the World War II in my interview with her. I put to her Murakami's idea that World War II was behind the cuteness so popular in Japan today. Initially Mori concedes to Murakami's view.

> Of course there's some influence. There is a darkness in 70s comics, in 60s comics, post-war comics. That I can see. It is probably post-war syndrome, but the cute characters which you're talking about, I don't feel any darkness.
> (Mori interview 2004)

Mori then, offers an alternative reading of the situation, but which again suggests that cuteness is used as a form of cover up or escapism.

> For my childhood, maybe around the 70s to early 80s, there was some kind of post-war movement, but those characters like *Hello Kitty* and other characters, maybe it's to hide the darkness, or maybe the absence of darkness. That's what people wanted at that time, maybe they were sick of darkness.
> (Mori interview 2004)

In this way cuteness might be compared to other kinds of what Murakami terms 'mind escape.' (Murakami interview 2004)

While Murakami highlights the importance of Japan's relationship with America, he also compares cuteness with Western drug culture.

> [W]e also want to get excited, there is that spirit. Sex and drugs, for example, raves for example, various cultures came out, didn't they. I think that there is a reason why those things appeared. In the same way cuteness came out in Japan, and people can get excited by that. Because people are excited by it, it created a boom, and it became more and more popular. I think there will be many people who think that going to a club and saying 'ah' is a different feeling from saying '*kawaii*', but I think that these two are the same. Something like the pleasant feeling when endorphins are released (pshew) in the brain, that sort of pleasant feeling 'ah'. (Murakami interview 2004)

Murakami's comparison of cuteness to a drug effect resonates with 'intensities of highs and lows,' referred to by Jameson. (Jameson quoted in Stephanson 1986/87, 69)

Jameson refers to the 'euphoria' that accompanies late capitalism. (Jameson 1991, 276)

> The world thereby momentarily loses its depth and threatens to become a glossy skin, a stereoscopic illusion, a rush of filmic images without density. But is this now a terrifying or an exhilarating experience? (Jameson 1991, 34)

Jameson links this experience to the 'addiction' of consumers' appetite, and to the key notion of schizophrenic or 'drug language.' (Jameson quoted in Stephanson 1986/87, 69) The concept of schizophrenia, with regard to Murakami's work and notions of the postmodern, will be examined in chapter 5.

'*Hiropon*', referred to in Hiropon Factory, the original name for Murakami's studio, and his figure work *Hiropon* 1997, was a legal drug, actually the amphetamine Benzedrine, which was popular in Japan in the post-war period.

> If you're exhausted, pop a pill and you fly around, you become like *Miss Hiropon*. Japanese *anime* culture can be compared to a kind of drug culture. (Murakami 1996, 36)

This use of the word *Hiropon* echoes Jameson's arguments surrounding the addictive potential of consumerism, but also the subculture of *otaku*, which will be examined in chapter 4.

Mori Mariko suggests there is a fundamental difference between Disney characters and *Hello Kitty*.

> I think when you look at Disney and *Hello Kitty*, there's definitely a difference... Disney is like adult created for children, *Hello Kitty* is more childish, a childlike mind created it for children. Another one is an adult businessman creating for a child. A childlike person creating for a child is totally different. It's more honest,

> more vulnerable. And that is what attracted adults in the end. Because it's the innocence, and that's something you lost. (Mori interview 2004)

Saitô Tamaki also argues that there is a basic difference between Japanese characters and Disney characters, and that Japanese character culture is different to that of the West. (Saitô 2000, 18-22) Where Disney's characters are function metaphorically, as fictional equivalents to human beings, Japanese characters such as *Hello Kitty* in contrast, appeal metonymically. Essentially, Japanese characters operate in a less complex way, as a kind of code. Cute characters such as *Hello Kitty* work by direct association, they are symbols of cuteness. Whereas Disney characters can communicate with us through shared sympathy with humans, Sanrio characters fail to communicate with us on this level. According to Saitô, this explains why Disney characters can function in narratives without humans, while Japanese characters such as *Pikachu* and *Doraemon* serve humans in their narratives, or why, like *Hello Kitty*, they exist outside of narrative. (Iwabuchi Koichi in Tobin 2004, 71) This is connected to the lack of depth of these character-icons discussed earlier in this section with relation to Baudrillard's noition of the simulacrum. Morikawa Kaichirô also alludes to a difference with Japanese characters, pointing out that there are no Disney *otaku*. (Morikawa 2003, 100) It is necessary to look at how cuteness developed through *shôjo* culture in order to trace this divergence with Disney.

Shôjo Cuteness

Shôjo manga played an important role in the rise of the popularity of cuteness in the post-war period, transforming cuteness into a visual and conceptual icon. Anne Allison also argues that cuteness, a powerful theme in contemporary Japanese character merchandising, developed out of the *shôjo* culture of the 1970s. Eager to acknowledge and celebrate Japan's newfound prosperity after the hardships of the war and occupation eras, Japanese society in the 1970s embraced the tastes of adolescent girls for 'fancy' goods and a carefree lifestyle that seemed to 'value cuteness above all other virtues'. (Allison 2004, 40) 'Fancy goods' consisted of stationery, accessories, clothes etc. decorated with cute characters and designs, by the famous *shôjo* illustrator Makoto for example. (Ill.2-17) This kind of merchandising perhaps marks an important point in the creation of cute character goods.

バッグ右　布製 メーカー名等不明
バッグ左　ビニール製 クツワ メイトBAG「Selena」シリーズ
（クツワ株式会社）700円

フクスケ マコちゃんシューズ
（福助株式会社）18.0cm赤 410円

なつかしのmacotoグッズ，いろいろ

真琴先生デザインの商品。
あなたは何を持っていましたか？

コーリン色鉛筆
「forLady」シリーズ36色
（コーリン鉛筆株式会社）480円

水筒
YAZAKI SUITO

クツワ筆入 5ドア筆入
「Selena」シリーズ

右：しょうちゃんえノートシルバー
パリジェンヌ　定価50円
左：しょうちゃんえノートカキカキ
パリジェンヌ　定価30円（ショウワノート）

シュミーズ／マンガスター
（大阪繊維工業株式会社）

2-17. Makoto, 1970s
Various ‘fancy goods’
From Macoto 1999, 43

Shôjo manga are quite distinguished from *shônen manga* (youth comics). *In shôjo manga* the characters' inner worlds were important themes, with the use of the background, particularly blooming flowers, to express the heroine's feelings, and to emphasise emotion, for example. One of the first magazines especially for *shôjo* was *Shôjo kai* in 1902, while the early beginnings of *shôjo manga* can be traced back to the 1920s and popular authors like Yoshiya Nobuko, who created saccharine-sweet romantic tales, such as *Hana Monogatari* (Flower tales) 1916-1924. *Hana Monogatari* was republished in 1939 with illustrations by Nakahara Junichi, who in the 1930s illustrated serialized novelettes such as *Hana Nikki* (Flower Diary) by Kawabata Yasunari, and incorporated art trends emanating from Europe and drew demure young Japanese girls with large, dreamy eyes.

Big eyes with stars were used to show inner feeling, and a character's status in the narrative, and became a key feature of *shôjo manga*. One early example is the *manga Gin no hanabira* (silver petals) 1958 by Mizuno Hideko. (Ill.2-18) They also permit the creative expression of the *manga* artist, acting like a signature. Philip Brophy's study of cartoon eyes traces this way of drawing eyes to an American version of a European style. American artists in Europe were influenced by post-war kitsch and painted the wide-eyed refugee waifs they saw in France and Italy. 'This "look" connotes a certain sadness typical of much post-war kitsch.' (Brophy 1997, 29) Brophy refers to artists such as Margaret and Walter Keane, who were very popular in America right up until the 1960s. In Japan they embraced 'this particular Americanized therapeutically-designed version of Euro cute.' (Brophy 1997, 30)

Nara's works also include similar images of young girls or *shôjo*. (Ill.2-19) (Treat 1993, 353-387) Neither child nor yet fully adult, *shôjo* first appeared from the late 19th century, slightly removed from the rest of society, free from obligations, until they take on the role of mother or more recently, the role of career women. In the Taishô period rising affluence also permitted upper class families to send their daughters to girls' schools, creating a youthful and all-female subculture. In magazines, on television, Treat states,

> the barely (and thus ambiguously) pubescent woman is there both to promote products and purchase them, to excite the consumer and herself be thrilled by the flurry of goods and services that circulate like toys around her. (Treat 1993, 361)

John Whittier Treat's key study traces the modern concept of the *shôjo* back to the Meiji period, when rapid economic change produced a social utility for 'adolescence,' a period

2-18. Mizuno Hideko, 1958
Gin no hanabira
Manga page featuring Mami

2-19. Nara Yoshitomo, 1999
Illustration for December 25
From Nara 2001, n.p.

between childhood and adulthood during which labour is trained for its role in industrial culture. Nara indeed states that his works are set just as we approach adulthood. (Murakami and Nara 2001) Matsui links Nara's images of *shôjo* to Julia Kristeva's notion of the adolescent, a mental state that can be defined by the mode of radical imagination that crosses the differences of sex or identity, reality or fantasy, and threatens to disrupt logical orders. (Matsui 1999, 8-13)

Catherine Driscoll in her study of girl culture refers to the formation of girlhood in the late modern Japanese period, which she argues covers the same terrain as feminine adolescence in the West. (Driscoll 2002, 290) Driscoll relates this to Gilles Deleuze's concept of 'the little girl.' Becoming-woman draws on Deleuze's prior conception of 'the little girl' in *The Logic of Sense*, where he appropriates Alice as the nonlinear series of the girl and becoming-woman. As Grosz points out, Deleuze utilizes 'the girl as the site of a culture's most intensified disinvestments and re-castings of the body.' (Driscoll 2002, 195)

Susan Napier highlights aspects of *shôjo* culture that have taken on a new importance in contemporary Japanese popular culture.

> [T]he term shôjo has become a shorthand for a certain kind of liminal identity between adult and child, characterized by a supposedly innocent eroticism based on sexual immaturity, a consumer culture of buying 'cute' (*kawaii*) material goods, and a wistful privileging of a recent past or free floating form of nostalgia. (Napier 2000. 118)

While the importance of nostalgia will be discussed further in chapter 6, the notion of an innocent sexuality is one that is also alluded to in the works of Mori Mariko.

Mori Mariko's images of *shôjo*, in *Birth of a Star*, (Ill.2-20) and other works such as *Love Hotel* for example, evoke a sexual desirability. As Norman Bryson states, Mori

> locates a potential for disharmony in the Western opposition between the supposedly pre-sexual category of childhood, and the category of adolescence or adulthood where sexuality stands for whatever in the subject remains mutinous or wild. Mori's imagery undoes that opposition: on the one hand it sexualises the child, while on the other it infantilizes the adult. Mori's avatars of feminine sexuality insist on a nursery world of pastel colors and round, huggable shapes. (Bryson 1998, 80)

In these computer-manipulated photographs Mori's feminine sexuality insists on 'a

sexuality that constantly moves toward the infantile – where the infantile is also the cute.' (Bryson 1998, 80)

Mori as a cyber pop star in *The Birth of Star* 1995 seems a perfect product and embodiment of contemporary popular culture. Mori made a limited edition doll for *Parkett* in 1998. (Ill.2-21) It points to the commodification of pop music, and as a produced, commodity style work, also the merchandising that goes with being a celebrity. In an interview with Mori by Fujimori Manami in *Bijutsu Techô*, referring to her costume pieces, Mori argues that since Warhol movie stars and pop stars have become icons, but icons that are largely media manufactured. Image processing, media manipulation, the work of producers, are important considerations in these works. (Fujimori 1995, 50-55)

The *Kase Taishu Project* 1994 marked Murakami's intervention into the pop music business. In a famous dispute between the singer Kase Taishu and his manager, the manager felt he had the rights to the name and hired a 'New Kase Taishu' when they split up. Murakami announced the existence of four other Taishus, and received considerable media attention.

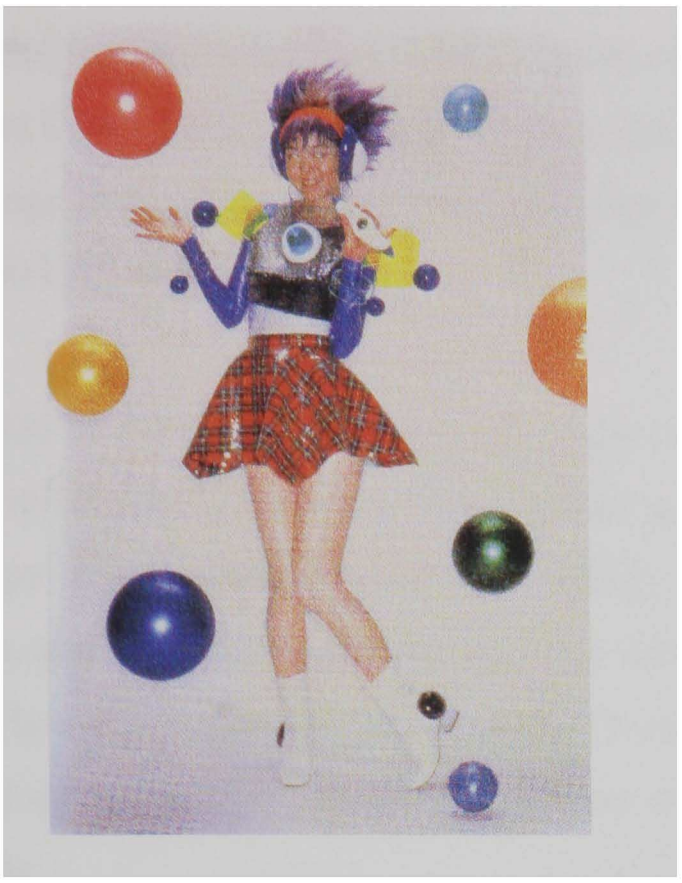
> In Japan, nothing is real. A good example of this is the Japanese idol-making machine, which, unlike the system that operates in the U.S., is continuous. It has an incredible stranglehold on the production and consumption of culture. Here, everything is fake. Everything is managed and controlled.
> (Murakami quoted in Pagel 2001, n.p.)

Murakami states that one of the aims of the Hiropon Factory was to produce artists, and explore the process of producing pop stars.

Cute fashion in Japan was more than merely cuddling cute things; it was all about 'becoming' the cute object itself by acting infantile and being surrounded with cuteness.

> Being cute meant behaving childlike – which involved an act of self-mutilation, posing with pigeon toes, pulling wide-eyed innocent expressions, dieting, acting stupid, and essentially denying the existence of the wealth of insights, feelings, and humour that maturity brings with it. In cute culture, young people became popular according to their apparent weakness, dependence and inability, rather than because of their strengths and capabilities. (Kinsella 1995, 237)

An early instance of the trend of teen pop idols acting childish is the television programme *Sunset Kittens*, which started in the late 1970s, and was hosted entirely by schoolgirls. It consisted of games, songs, sketches ridiculing adults and an ongoing competition amongst



2-20. Mori Mariko, 1995
Birth of a Star
Duratrans print, acrylic, light box, audio CD
183 x 122 cm
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago

2-21. Mori Mariko, 1998
Birth of a Star
Doll for *Parkett* no.54 1998/99, p204
Height 26 cm
Limited edition of 99

schoolgirls who wanted to join the team of amateur hosts, otherwise known as the *Onyanko Club* (Kitten Club). *Seirâ fuku o nugasanaide* (Don't take off my sailor uniform) was one of the hit songs of the Kitten Club. Pop idols used to dress in doll costumes, and act cute. (Stanlaw 2000, 75-100)

Cuteness, however, can be overdone. Young women who carry the cute style too far are known as *burikko*, a mildly derogatory term that was first used to describe Matsuda Seiko, the ultimate idol singer who reached her peak of popularity in the 1980s with twenty-four straight number ones, and television commercial tie-ins with Shiseidô. In 1997 *Hello Kitty* experienced another boom in popularity due to another female pop star Kahara Tomomi, who 'blurted out that she loved Kitty' on the well-known television show *Utaban*. (Belson and Bremner 2004, 8)

Cuteness is something Japanese girls and young mothers want both to have and to be. 'There seems to be a metonymic logic at work: if you like cute things, you must be cute yourself.' (Tobin 2004, 284) The relationship between the cute and the consumer becomes more complicated, because not only does the consumer want to mother the cute, the observer wants to become the cute, simultaneously wanting to care for it, own it, and become it. 'Appreciating cuteness expresses the double logic of identification, its fundamental inseparability from desire.' (Merish 1996, 186)

Hiromix's early photographs from her book *Girls Blue* 1996, are snapshots of her everyday world, pictures of her and her friends consuming, a documentary of *shôjo* culture, taken with a Konica Big Mini pocket camera. (Ill.2-22) This illustration of her photo of a girl imitating the character on her T-shirt captures the concept of cute character imitation that Azuma Hiroki refers to as characteristic of the postmodern. (Azuma 2000b, 2-8) *Girls Blue* is based on her earlier *Seventeen Girl Days*, a 36-page photo book made of color copies of regular prints which won the '*Shashin shin-seiki*' (New Century photography) photo contest in March 1995. Hiromix's photos belong to the tradition of the photo diary, a girl's everyday life made up of pets, records, posters, flowers, friends, and self-portraits, and defined the '*onnanoko no shashinka*' (girl photographer) boom of the early 1990s, which was characterized by disposable cameras and snapshots documenting the everyday lives of

2-22. Hiromix, 1996
Untitled photo from *Girls Blue* 1996, n.p.
Tokyo: Rockin' on

teenaged girls. She is 'a superstar photographer who has mutated out of Japan's super flat society.' (Murakami 2000, 117)

Sharon Kinsella also refers to the idea that modern consumers might not be able to meet and develop relationships with people, but the implication of cute goods design meant that they could develop these relations through cute objects. (Kinsella 1995) Saitô Tamaki questions whether it is not a pathological escape, and considers the question of 'character' as firmly rooted in psychopathology (post traumatic stress disorder, and multiple personality disorder like schizophrenia). (Saitô 2000) Loving a character, Azuma argues, and feeling like being a character; these are not just hobbies but ways of living in the age of postmodern. (Azuma 2000b, 8)

Azuma argues humans in Japan are becoming like characters. (Azuma 200b, 2-8) He sites for example, dealing with the sales assistant in a convenience store, which, he argues, is less real human interaction and more like the interaction with the computer graphic characters which often appear on the screens of ATM machines found in Japan. Characters, Azuma argues, can be regarded as an interface for personal relations. He also refers to an expression 'character change' in Japan, used, for example, when a young girl studies hard, but changes into a prostitute after school. (Azuma 2000b, 8) *Kosupure*, the practice of wearing costumes and dressing up as *manga* characters, and *imekura* hostess clubs where the girls also wear costumes, provide other examples.

Girl Power

At first glance, Sanrio's now more then thirty-year-old mascot appears to play to old-fashioned notions of femininity in *Hello Kitty* products ranging from plush dolls to pocketbooks to pet carriers which are usually a soft, pastel pink. She's generally perceived as quiet, demure and endearingly sweet. That she isn't drawn with a mouth is symbolic of the voicelessness of *Hello Kitty*.

> The process of conveying cuteness to the viewer disempowers its objects, forcing them into ridiculous situations and making them appear more ignorant and vulnerable than they really are. (Harris 2000, 6)

Women wearing animal costumes, particularly cats and rabbits, can often be seen in *manga*, in various street fashions of wearing ears or tails, and in sex clubs, playing on an

2-23. Kiko Wu, 2003
Internet photo, www.kikowu.com

animal cuteness associated with needing affection. An image of Kiko Wu, a twenty-three year-old former New York stripper originally from Guangdong, posing with *Hello Kitty* on her website, highlights a displacement of cuteness into the realm of the erotic, and is an issue that will be examined in more detail in chapter 4. (Ill.2-23)

One of McVeigh's key points is that cuteness is used to manipulate women and to keep them subservient. (McVeigh 1996, 291-312) McVeigh argues cuteness communicates messages about being the 'ideal' woman and sends messages of how women should behave, especially with men. Independence, he argues, is traditionally considered threatening, especially in women. By curbing these threats in the somewhat palatable camouflage of cuteness, at least in the fantasy world of *manga*, the concept of the ideal woman is redefined and, in turn, influences younger generations of girls. Kinsella is particularly critical of McVeigh's comments on how cuteness is used to communicate messages about the 'ideal' woman, and questions McVeigh's methodology, which was largely based on interviews with university students in Japan, arguing that it is based on anecdotal evidence. (Kinsella 1997, 383-385) The complexities of this debate are shown up by the complaints in 1994 of JAL female flight attendants after they had been asked to wear *Mickey Mouse* ears as part of a Disney promotion, which included the outside of the plane being covered in Disney Characters (ANA had had a similar successful *Pokemon* promotion on their flights). (Yamaguchi 1994, 3)

Cuteness becomes the expected feminine virtue, and Shiokawa argues that in this value system the notion of cuteness generates and maintains gender stereotypes, even though they have gone through a great contextual and formal evolution in the past several decades.

> 'Cute' means imperfection, as it is conversely exemplified by the 'beautiful' nemeses at the apex of 'non-available for everyone, especially considering that there is no absolute set of qualifications associated with this concept. In other words, even a 'beautiful' woman can become 'cute' if she develops fuzzy, likeable poses to the general public. (Shiokawa 1999, 120)

Catherine Driscoll refers to discourses around the girl market that often describe a demographic 'wrapped up in negotiating their own power and powerlessness through consumption,' and that analyses of how girls consume tend to focus on assessing the conformity or nonconformity of girls as consumers or girls as products, but 'any marketing strategy works by trying to manipulate conformity, including conformity to the image of nonconformity.' (Driscoll 2002, 269)

> When feminist analysis of girl culture recognizes that girls are not merely dupes of patriarchal capitalist systems, it often focuses on nonconformist consumption among rebellious (understood as subcultural) girl groups or redefines consumption as itself resistant at the expense of ignoring what conformity might entail or produce. (Driscoll 2002, 278)

Where the heroine was often cute, the nemesis was usually by contrast *utsukushii* (beautiful), and more voluptuous. Young Marie Antoinette and Madame Du Barry in *Berusaiyu no bara* (The Rose of Versailles) in 1972, in *Lupin III* the beautiful crook Mine Fujiko is played against a cute heroine, and the princess in *Cariostro no shiro* (The Castle of Cagliostro) 1979 directed by Miyazaki Hayao are examples.

> This particular formula implicitly leaves a message that being 'cute' is a virtue and, in an oddly paradoxical way, strength. However, cuteness in this instance is not in direct opposition to ugliness or neatness. It is clear by the characteristics of the heroine's nemesis, that cuteness in the girls' comics convention battles against 'beauty,' that is, perfection and maturity. (Shiokawa 1999, 107)

Whereas beauty is an unequal condition, achieved by only a few, cute could be achieved by anyone.

Shiokawa Kanako also points to an apparent ambiguity in cuteness, surrounding cuteness and its importance in gender roles.

> On the one hand, the Japanese vision of the 'cute' female provides a strategic guideline for a girl child to benefit in a grossly imperfect world dominated by grown-up boys, but it also deludes her into believing the relative importance of being 'cute'. (Shiokawa 1999, 121)

The *manga Bishôjo Senshi Seirâ Mûn* (Beautiful Young Girl Warrior Sailor Moon) by Takeuchi Naoko is the story of a 14 year old, who with 4 other girls, transforms into the superhero Sailor scouts who fight the evil Negaverse to save the world. She is cute and strong, a warrior, and a new kind of hero for a new 1990s Japanese girl. *Sailor Moon* is powerful at the same time being cute raises a key question regarding cuteness and *shôjo*.

The story of *Sailor Moon* takes place in Azabu Jûban, Tokyo, home to the Tsukino family, and their teenage daughter Usagi. '*Tsukino usagi*' literally means 'the moon's rabbit' and refers to the rabbit visible on the moon according to Japanese folklore, and which holds a vial of the elixir of immortality long sought after by Chinese Taoists. *'Usagi-chan'* also means 'bunny'. Usagi turns out to be the reincarnation of the Moon Princess Serenity. She is always late to school, too lazy to study and often in trouble for bad grades. One day she

2-24. Tarô Chiezô, 1994
Powerful Girl II
Acrylic, lace, cloth, paper
110 x 91 cm
From Hiratsuka Museum of Art 1996, p48

encounters a black cat with a crescent shaped mark on its forehead, which gives her a spell that transforms her into a super heroine.

> But through all of this everyday girliness, violence is not only part of Sailor moon's life but defines her. She attacks not only in self-defence but when she judges her culture or world to be threatened; or even to improve it. This violence is bizarrely by femininity and markers of girlhood – her weapons include a range of moon rods to engulf enemies in ribbons and hearts, and her tiara can be used a discus to stun or even kill. (Driscoll 2002, 295)

Sailor Moon was serialized in the girls' magazine *Nakayoshi* in 1991, with a circulation of 2 million. An animated version appeared on TV Asahi in 1992 on Saturday nights at 7.00 pm, and continued to run for 5 years. A mass of merchandising, and commodity goods followed. Bandai, the Japanese toy maker, achieved massive sales of *Sailor Moon* merchandise. A more powerful than ever female lead role, replacing the usual sidekick role, and becoming extremely popular, this was a positive step for female gender representation, but one perhaps driven by wanting to include girls in the warrior goods market.

Tarô Chiezô's work *Powerful Girl II* 1994, shown in the 'Tokyo Pop' exhibition, features the powerful super heroine *Sailor Moon*. (Ill.2-24) This work, as Matsui Midori states,

> satirizes the reification of the fantasy image of a young girl's body by the Japanese popular media. At the same time, its evocation of the living-room décor of an average Japanese household indicates that the media fetishism for little girls merely reflects an aspect of the Japanese patriarchy, which is heavily dependent on the practical and symbolic functions of Wife as Mother-Child in the household. (Matsui 1996b, 124)

When she transforms into *Sailor Moon*, her nails turn red, eyelashes grow longer, jewelry appears, her uniform is stripped off, and she reappears in a mini-skirted, sexier version that shows off her newly enlarged breasts. *Sailor Moon* is also a sex icon. As sexy cute women in revealing costumes became more visible in popular *manga*, Shiokawa Kanako argues that this trend of very skimpy outfits might have been a trade off with the cute girls' increased power with male readers' voyeurism. Nagai Gô's earlier *manga Cutey Honey* 1973 had also starred a heroine who gets completely naked to transform into her super hero version.

The apparent contrast between the cuteness and the power of action heroines such as *Cutey Honey* is an issue which I put to Mori Mariko in my interview with her. For Mori *manga*

2-25. Bome, 1994
Sailor Moon
1/4 scale figure

2-26. Blackdog, 2000
Sailor Moon
Manga back cover

and *anime* 'are a portrait of people's dreams, their fantasies,' and even while she suggests there might be an element of feminist expression, the powerful women, are the projection of a dream of contemporary society. (Mori interview 2004)

Figurine maker Bome's model *Sailor Moon* figure highlights the popularity of this character within the *otaku* subculture. (Ill.2-25) Numerous underground adult parody versions also appeared from within the *dôjinshi* (amateur *manga*) scene. (Ill.2-26)

> With her leggy slender body, long flowing blonde hair, and the mini-skirted version of her outfit she acquires after morphing, *Seirâ Mûn* is also read as a sex-icon – one that feeds and is fed by a general trend in Japan towards the infantilization of female sex objects. (Allison 2000, 138)

Sailor Moon not only wears a sailor outfit, but is named for it. This is the uniform worn by many girls in junior and senior high school in Japan. The uniformed schoolgirl is also a dominant trope in pornography, *manga* and sex culture in general in Japan, and *Sailor Moon* while aimed at young children, also has an adult male following amongst *otaku*. In Sharon Kinsella's essay 'What's Behind the Fetishism of Japanese School Uniforms?' she examines the presence within post-war pornography of 'wholesome and innocent schoolgirls in sailor suits' which is 'almost certainly related to their officially chaste character.' (Kinsella 2002, 219)

In McVeigh's study of uniforms in Japan and the role of the state in people wearing uniforms, he argues cute conduct reinforces patriarchal corporate culture. However he also links uniforms to subversion, and the practice of customizing uniforms, for example with *rûzusokkusu* (loose socks), shortened skirts, cute accessories. (McVeigh 2000b) This is often done immediately after school has finished in what represents a real life transformation, as skirt hems raise, socks become loose and heavy make-up appears, and is often accompanied by an abandonment of feminine speech in favour of blunt 'obdurate' language, a 'rejection of any likelihood of them being sanctioned by the existing civil society.' (Treat 1993, 361) This quick change of character can be linked to Azuma's writing on character change discussed earlier in this chapter.

Between 1995 and 1998 a new style emerged in Tokyo which appeared to be 'a series of self-conscious responses to media images and debate about high-school girls.' (Kinsella 2002, 229) These girls became known as *kogyaru*, and were stereotyped with a *burusera*

(the selling of school knickers), and *enjo kôsai* (compensated dating), and created a moral panic at the end of the 1990s. (Narumi 2004, 47-55) '*Ko*' means either small or child, and '*gyaru*' means girl. 'Loose socks' had first appeared in Azuma Hideo's Lolita Complex *manga Scrap Gakuen* 1986. (Kinsella 2002, 237) Teen fashion magazines such as *pop teen*, *kawaii!* and *egg*, which was launched in 1996, were part of the *kogyaru* scene and lead to the later trend of *Ganguro*, an exaggeration of *kogyaru*, and famous for their very dark make-up, white lipstick and eye shadow, and platform boots.

Kinsella focuses on how cuteness has been associated with gender rebellion, arguing the word '*kawaii*' first really started being used in the 1970s as an in-group slang word by certain schoolgirl cliques. (Kinsella 1995) Their use of cute infantile slang was also used for more adult themes. Sex for example, became popularly referred to as *nyan nyan suru* (to *meow meow*). The popularity of the word '*kawaii*' in the early 1970s began with a cute handwriting craze, when in 1974 large numbers of teenagers, especially girls, began to write using a new style of childish characters. Schoolgirls used extremely stylized, rounded characters and little cartoon pictures such as hearts, stars and faces inserted randomly into the text. The writing was written horizontally rather than vertically, and contained many words written in English. By 1978 the phenomenon had become nation-wide. In middle and high schools the new style caused discipline problems, and in some schools the writing was banned entirely, or tests which were completed in the new cute style would not be marked. The new style of handwriting was described by a variety of names such as *marui ji* (round writing), *koneko ji* (kitten writing), *manga ji* (comics writing) and *burikko ji* (fake-child writing).

> These young people were rebelling against traditional Japanese culture and identifying with European culture, which they obviously imagined to be more fun. By writing in the new cute style, it was almost as if young people had invented a new language in which they were suddenly able to speak freely on their own terms for the first time. (Kinsella 1995, 224)

What began as an underground trend amongst young people was adopted by magazines, advertising, packaging and word processor software design. Treat also refers to this 'child-like script' commonly seen in *shôjo manga*, and Yamane Kazuma's study which refers to it as 'deviant *shôjo* orthography', and speculates that it became popular 'because it marks graphically the private discourses of adolescent female culture.' (Treat 1993, 381)

2-27. Tezuka Osamu, 1953
Ribon no kishi (Princess Knight)
Manga page

PART.4
猫拳パニック

2-28. Takahashi Rumiko, 1987
Ranma 1/2
Manga page '*Neko ken panikku*' (Cat fist Panic)
Shônen Sunday Comics
Tokyo: Shôgakukan

As the *shôjo manga* genre expanded in the 1960s and more women drew *manga*, and more editors were women, traditional gender boundaries began to blur. Mochizuki Akira and Jinbô Shirô's *Sain wa V* (the sign is V), a *manga* based on the 1964 Japanese Olympic volleyball team which won the gold medal, for example. In 1969 Mizuno Hideko began *Fire!*, a long saga of a rock and roll singer in the American counter-culture which included sex, drugs, death, and disillusionment.

Cuteness and gender representations in *shôjo manga*, rather than preserve the gender status quo, often seem to question the pre-existing boundaries. Ikeda Riyoko one of the *Hana no 24 nengumi* (24 year group), a group of female *manga* artists all born in the same year, wrote *Berusaiyu no bara* (The Rose of Versailles), published in *Shûkan Mâgaretto* from 1972. It was the story of a woman guard named Oscar François de Jarjeyes set in the French Court during the Revolution. Oscar was a woman whose father had raised her as the son he had really wanted. The story gradually shifts from presenting a woman's life to depicting a person free from fixed gender ideology. At first Oscar seems to reinscribe the feminine, longing to be a woman in spite of wearing male clothes. However, by wearing male clothes Oscar gradually reveals what 'she' cannot do, in other words, the text unveils the ideological construction of femininity through her cross-dressing.

Tezuka's *manga Ribon no kishi* (A Knight in Ribbons or Princess Knight) 1954, first published in the girls' magazine *Shôjo Club*, strikes a balance between romance and action, often relying on humour to hold the two together. (Ill.2-27) *Ribon no kishi* was a sensation among girls in Japan, and had many of the ingredients of today's successful *shôjo manga*. The story featured a princess, Sapphire, who mistakenly receives both a boy's and a girl's soul before her birth. As the only offspring of the royal family she is raised as a boy. Playing two gender roles simultaneously, gender identity was a concern from the outset.

Tsurumi Maia's study of gender roles in *shôjo manga* highlights *Yûkan Club* by female *manga* artist Ichijô Yukari as another example in which gender roles are blurred, the traditional distinct dichotomy between men and women is broken down, and the characters are not limited by traditional models of masculinity and femininity. (Tsurumi 2000) Primarily for high school girls, it appeared in *Ribbon Original* from 1982-1992.

In the 1980s female roles also changed in *shônen manga* where cute girls began to take many of the lead roles. The readers of gender specific *manga* also began to blur. The terms *shônen* and *shôjo manga* became categories for specific stylistic and thematic features, but did not entirely reflect their actual readership. Takahashi Rumiko was one of the few women drawing comics for boys and young men. An illustration from *Ranma 1/2* 1987 highlights how she often emphasizes the sex appeal of her female characters, while also portraying powerful characters. (Ill.2-28) Takahashi is not feminist but rather offers a view of the female perspective. Takahashi enrolled in Koike Kazuo's famous training ground for *manga* artists, *Gekiga Sonjuku*. Koike is best known as the author of *Kozure ôkami* (Lone Wolf and Cub), which was published weekly from 1970-76. *Ranma 1/2* began in 1987 and continued her romantic comedy formula. In it Saotome Ranma, a young martial artist (originally a boy) accidentally fell into a magic hot spring in China, and now switches from male to female depending on whether he/she gets wet with hot or cold water. When released in October 1988, Volume 5 of the series sold over a million copies in less than a month. *Ranma 1/2* is much more action-oriented than Takahashi's previous works following the trend of Toriyama Akira's *Dragon ball*, the favorite *manga* series for young boys at that time.

The argument that positions simultaneous dual sex roles as a symbol of *shôjo* culture, where *shôjo* culture is a venue of escapism from the pressure of social expectations and regulations, can be traced back to the influential *Takarazuka Revue Company*, an all female theater group that was established in 1914 by Kobayashi Ichizô. Catherine Driscoll, referring to Jennifer Robertson's study *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Japan* 1998, links *Sailor Moon* to *Takarazuka*.

> Sex is explicitly raised by Sailor Moon's passion for Tuxedo Mask, and Takeuchi has stressed that two of the Sailors, Uranus and Neptune, are intended to be lovers. They are thus not only sexually inflected schoolgirls but also suggest that Robertson's analysis of gender diversity in the Takarazuka can be extended more widely to Japanese girl culture. (Driscoll 2002, 295)

Advertised as entertainment for girls, by girls, and about girls, it offered a chance to escape into a glitzy, glamorous world where love conquers all. *Otokoyaku* were the women actors who played the men, and were the stars the fans loved the most. In 1980 *Takarazuka* performed a musical version of *Berusaiyu no bara*. Significantly Tezuka Osamu was raised in Takarazuka, Hyogo prefecture, the birthplace of the theatre company.

Shôjo manga often included themes of rebellion and issues of gender roles. According to Kinsella there was 'a new kind of petulant refusal to be subservient females which can be observed in modern young women following cute fashion.' (Kinsella 1995, 249)

> [T]he depiction of the female gender in mainstream Japanese comics went through a change in the eighties, from mere accessories of boy heroes to more aggressive and self-sufficient co-workers (or even commanders). This change, combined with other factors that catered to the treatment of sexuality, was the main factor for the explosion of 'cute' action heroines in the later half of the 1980s in Japan. (Shiokawa 1999, 113)

Kadokawa Haruki's film *Seirâfuku to Kikanjû* (Sailor suit and Machinegun) 1981 starring Yakushimaru Hiroko was the story of a high school girl who becomes the boss of a *yakuza* (Japanese mafia) gang.

With video in the 1980s came an *anime* boom, but with the expenses of production *anime* needed to attract a wider audience base than *manga*, and a result of this was that *anime* took aspects from both *shônen* and *shôjo manga* in order to appeal to both audiences. Miyazaki Hayao, one of Japan's most famous animated film directors, began his career at Tezuka's Mushi Studio. Miyazaki's *shôjo* are less dreamy and ultra feminine than earlier depictions of *shôjo*, and more brave, inquisitive, and risk-taking. By highlighting his female characters and making them assertive, empowered, and independent, Miyazaki emphasizes these attributes, forcing the viewer to be aware at a level that a more conventional male protagonist would be unlikely to stimulate. (Napier 2000) A young girl's fresh and clear-eyed perception of the world is the key to *Tonari no totoro* (my neighbour Totoro) the biggest domestic box office hit of 1989 in Japan. (Drazen 2003) In *Mononoke Hime* (Princess Mononoke) 1999, the film's two central characters subvert the myth of Japanese women as supportive, nurturing and dependent on men. (Napier 2000, 33)

In the 1980s the increasing economic power of young women affected Japanese popular culture, and the proliferation of cuteness has been linked to the rise of the female consumer. The cute style, which dominated Japanese popular culture in the 1980s, coincided with the formative years of Tokyo Disney Land's success. (Raz 1999) In America the major customers are married couple over twenty-five with children. Sanrio's own research, also found in a market survey that 'items sold to Japanese girls between the age of five and the time of marriage would be bought in America only by girls from four to seven years old.'

(Raz 1999, 172) Similarly, the wider age range is evident in that many love hotels feature themed 'Disney rooms.' (Raz 1999, 173)

Kinsella argues that it was particularly the first half of the 1980s that cuteness was an overwhelming influence on Japanese culture, and that this boom in cuteness at this specific point in history is linked to the increasing assertiveness of young women and their stronger influence on contemporary culture, the entry of young single women into consumer culture, and the rise of feminism. (Kinsella 1997) Culture was feminized, and women became the leaders in Japanese youth culture. Kinsella argues that the popularity of 'fashionable infantilism' slowly cooled down during the latter half of the 1980s, and the 1990s, but whether she was actually premature in her assessment of the demise of cuteness can be questioned.

Contrary to Kinsella's claim that the popularity of cuteness peaked in the early 1980s, the actual continued rise and development of cuteness in Japanese popular culture opens up a gap in established research, to which this thesis aims to make a contribution.

In December 2002 *Fortune* magazine carried an article on the female business executive fans of *Hello Kitty* who sport *Kitty* paraphernalia. (Gorman 2002) *Hello Kitty*'s popularity among adult women was described as a kind of a 'wink on pink'; an act of defiance bringing cuteness into the corporate arena. It is a small but very public act of rebellion. A number of U.S. celebrities have been spotted with *Hello Kitty* goods: Mariah Carey has been seen carrying a Hello Kitty boom box; Cameron Diaz has a *Hello Kitty* necklace; figure-skater Michelle Kwan has been photographed with a *Hello Kitty* purse dangling from her shoulder; Courtney Love in a *Hello Kitty* T-shirt; Lisa Loeb's cover of her album, aptly titled *Hello Lisa*; New York fashion design duo Heatherette has incorporated *Hello Kitty* motifs into its line of punk-inspired couture. *Hello Kitty* fans can even be found in the Hawaiian female punk scene known as the *Riot Grrrl* movement.

> We equate cuteness not with full citizenship...As part of our individualism, Americans try to maintain a healthy distance from capitalism and from being manipulated. Showing off Kitty in normally sober settings affirms one's independence, even if it is tinged with humour.
> (Christine Yano quoted in Belson and Bremner 2004, 107)

Certainly consumption of *Hello Kitty* outside of Japan often contains much more irony.

While some take her at face value in a straight reading of her cute appeal, others use *Hello Kitty* to comment upon their own relationship to the stereotype.

While this section has examined the development of cuteness through *shôjo* culture, the focus now moves to how this *shôjo* cuteness has spread to include areas previously outside girl culture, in a process that has been variously described as the 'infatilization' of Japanese popular culture.

Infantilization

The 1960s were a time of student rebellion. Kinsella highlights the reading of *manga* as a kind of political demonstration by students against the status quo, and associates the cute phenomenon with a reaction against adult society.

> Childishness became equated with left wing politics and with youth culture. Young people in Japan seeking greater personal freedom adopted children's culture and the romantic images of childhood held within, because it was the only already extant cultural space in which individual freedom (as opposed to social obligation) was encouraged. Japanese cute constituted a stubborn resistance to entering into adult social relations. (Kinsella 1997, 384)

In the 1960s the cute look became increasingly important in popular culture worldwide. This was the time when Twiggy had made a worldwide sensation, and a skinny young girl fashion trend with mini skirts and exaggerated eye make-up became popular. (Ill.2-29)

The burst of the bubble in the 1990s and the perceived failure of Japan's post-war economic success has led to increasing disenchantment with the values and goals that much of post-war Japan has been built on.

> [T]he generation-spanning immersion in the illusory world of the manga, stands for a form of refusal to become an adult, i.e., to become totally integrated into the system. The current younger generation seems to believe instinctively, and as a kind of protective mechanism, that the only possibility of saving their identity from further erosion is to remain in a state of childlike innocence. (Brehm 2002, 17)

'[T]his disenchantment is very obvious in youth culture, which celebrates the ephemeral fashion of the *shôjo* (young girl) and the culture of *kawaii* (cuteness)' (Napier 2000, 29)

2-29. Makoto, 1967
Twiggy
From Macoto 1999, 20

2-30. Tsukuba University construction site warning sign, 2003
Photo the author

2-31. Shibuya construction warning sign, 2003
Photo the author

That cuteness was used as a rejection of conformity, and a refusal to grow up, representing a desire to stay childlike as a way of resistance/defiance, lead to an even greater presence of cuteness in Japanese popular culture.

> The resulting *infantilization of society*, however, not only increases their manipulability, but is easily utilised as a compensation mechanism by the post-capitalist economic system, and thus for additional profit. (Brehm 2002, 17)

This paradox is dealt with in different ways by the artists, and cuteness takes on different values in the works of Murakami and Nara, for example.

Matsui highlights the element of horror or violence often alluded to in Nara's works.

> While Murakami's 'dangerously cute' images reveal the incipience of mainstream Japanese culture, Nara's angelic-demonic children embody the coexistence of violence and innocence. (Matsui 2001b, 72)

The children Nara has created do not satisfy the need for an ideal world, but instead insist on the reality of the conflict. This element of horror is further examined in chapter 6.

Cuteness is not limited to goods aimed at children and young girls, but has spread to almost all aspects of Japanese popular culture. Cute images are used in Japan on information pamphlets highlighting the dangers of smoking in bed, or on construction site warning signs (Ills.2-30, 2-31), while the characters *Prince Pickles* and *Little Parsley* were used on military recruiting ads. (McVeigh 1996, 291-312) Yamane Kazuma asks what can we conclude about this 'complete infantilization' of Japan. The answer, she states, is straightforward. 'The girl has jumped up. The girl is boisterous.' (Yamane quoted in Kinsella 1995, 248)

In Asada Akira's essay 'Infantile capitalism and Japan's Postmodernisms: A Fairy Tale', his references to the 'feminine and infantile' continue the analogy with *shôjo*. (Asada 1989, 273-278) Asada states that where modernization is the process of maturation, Japan 'did not at all mature', but 'seems to be growing progressively more infantile.' (Asada 1989, 275) He argues 'the value of becoming an adult declined throughout the 1970s while Japan's infantile capitalism swept over Asia.' (Asada 1989, 278) This process of 'infantilization', he argues, is 'a parody of Hegelian world history' (Asada 1989, 276)

2-32. Aida Makoto, 1997
Gunjyo –zu '97 (young girls)
Pane, wrapping paper of characters *Hello Kitty* and *Kerokero keroppi*
116.5 x 91 cm
Private Collection

Images of *shôjo* have been conspicuous in contemporary art. Aida Makoto's work *Gunjyo-zu '97* (Young Girls 97) 1997 shows high school students from Tokyo and from provincial Japan on a school trip. (Ill.2-32) Some are wearing *rûzusokkusu* (loose socks) and have shortened their skirts. The two groups of girls carry two different types of Sanrio characters. High school girls also appear in Aida Makoto's works *Harakiri Schoolgirls* 2000, and *Schoolgirl Blender* 2001. In my interview with Aida I asked him about the recurring theme of schoolgirls in his works.

> Really, I think high school girls stand out in the city. In New York or London they aren't so conspicuous. In Tokyo's Maranouchi district there aren't so many, but in certain central areas like Shibuya the little lasses have taken over. If you live in Tokyo just going about your normal routine, whether you like it or not, they catch your eye. Good or bad, they are jumping out onto the scene. That's why I decided to paint a picture using them. (Aida interview 2004)

As Treat argues, the *shôjo* was rearticulated as a definitive feature of Japanese late model, consumer capitalism. (Treat 1993, 353-387)

What it is that *shôjo* symbolise in contemporary Japanese culture is a key question, and one taken up in Treat's study.

> *Shôjo* are relegated to play as pure sign. They effectively signify sheer consumption, their very referentless-ness is taken as emblematic of how contemporary culture manufactures and circulates images, information, concepts and discourses that constitute our experience of everyday life.
> (Treat 1993, 382)

Shôjo culture, excelled in its emptiness. Treat argues that *shôjo* are empty, an adolescent space without substantive or fixed subjective content, and a 'point' in the commodity loop that exists only to consume.

> The idea of 'emptiness,' both as one associated with *shôjo* culture and Japanese postmodernity in general, is probably, alongside 'commodity' the key term in contemporary Japanese cultural criticism today. (Treat 1993, 382)

Treat's study in this way links *shôjo* culture with postmodernism.

Another characteristic of the *shôjo*, which expanded in the 1980s was the increasing popularity of the term '*rorikon*' (Lolita complex), and the new, much reported-on trend of *enjo kôsai* (compensated dating), the practice of high school girls engaging in sexual relations, usually with a middle aged *sarariman*.

The word most often associated with this *shôjo* culture is *kawaii*, or 'cute.' This

> aesthetic value is directly linked to the consumer role that *shôjo* exist to play. A *kawaii* girl is attractive, and thus valorized, but lacks libidinal agency of her own. (Treat 1993, 363)

Treat points out that while others may sexually desire the *shôjo*, the *shôjo*'s own sexual energy, is directed toward stuffed animals, pink notebooks, strawberry crepes, and *Hello Kitty* novelties. Anno Hideaki's 1999 film *Love and Pop* is an examination of *enjo kôsai*, and this will be examined more fully in chapter 4, while Mori Mariko's *Love Hotel* 1994 which also deals with the issue of *enjo kôsai* will be examined in chapter 7.

Kinsella states that 'the main emphasis in the media treatment of high-school girls was a criticism of their materialism and apparently overwhelming desire to get money at any cost.' (Kinsella 2002, 228) Aida's depictions of schoolgirls, such as *Harakiri Schoolgirls* 2001 (Ill.2-33) and *Blender* 2000, also suggest a social critique, if not a condemnation of youth. This attitude toward *shôjo* can be linked to Okonogi Keigo's critique of youth in his famous article '*moratoriamu ningen no jidai*' (The Age of Moratorium People) 1977, in which he states

> An apathy characterized by lack of vitality, interest, responsibility, and impressionability prevails among today's young people, who can find no meaningful, permanent values in anything and only know how to involve themselves with temporary and provisional phenomena in a casual manner. Capricious and whimsical, they lack the will to be independent and have no ambitions, ideals, or aspirations. Such a youth pathology has now become marked. (Okonogi 1978, 22)

The expression *moratoriamu ningen* indicates a delay in the participation of adult life and maturity and has been in recent times associated with the culture of *kawaii*. (Belson and Bremner 2004, 21) In support of these theories, numerous books and articles, introduced phenomena like *enjo kôsai* and Lolita Complex pornography.

Originally Erik Erickson's term 'psychosocial moratorium' referred to a period of training or study in which young people were suspended from fulfilling their obligations and responsibilities to society. In Okonogi's interpretation it becomes a dominant 'social character'.

> [T]oday's youth culture itself is based on a commercial culture, or consumer culture. This trend indeed arises from the coincidence of the psychosocial moratorium, which allows youth to receive and consume everything without labouring to produce anything at all, with the characteristic features of an information- and consumption-orientated society, and has brought about an

2-33. Aida Makoto, 1999
Harakiri School girls (yellow)
Line drawing and computer graphics
From *21st Century Prints*, Autumn 2004, p49

extensive commercialization of the moratorium psychology. (Okonogi 1978, 20)

Kinsella, however, argues that moratorium was not a social disengagement, but one phase of transition from the industrial society to the society of information; young people disengage in the old world in order to engage with all the forces in the new one. (Kinsella 1995, 250)

The description of this moratorium mentality can also be read as a background for the phenomenon of *otaku*. From *moratoriamu ningen* we pick up the general social tone that sets the mood for the birth of the *otaku*, a mood characterized by self-dissociation in hyper-reality. The affluent consumer society, Okonogi states, has an infantilizing effect. Media and advertising appeal to the child in everyone leading to 'identity diffusion syndrome' and 'an ego vacuum'. (Okonogi 1978, 29)

Later in 1986, noted sociologist Nakano Osamu published a scathing critique of Japanese youth culture in which he raged against a generation inebriated with childishness and consumerism.

> In considering the personality traits of the new breed, the first characteristic we note is they are 'moratorium people' – that is, they do not grow up. It is not that they cannot but that they do not even try. They repudiate the maturity demanded by the norms of adult society and prefer to remain kids – a dramatic contrast with the members of the previous generation, who became anxious to attain full-fledged adulthood, when they reached the age of 20 or so. To be sure, the ability to remain kids presupposes the overprotection made possible by affluence, but it seems to me that the moratorium psychology also signifies repugnance toward the values underlying and created by modern society. (Nakano 1988, 12)

Though Nakano wasn't talking specifically about Japanese women, at that time Japanese women were delaying marriage, living at home, and spending money on fancy goods and foreign travel. (Belson and Bremner 2004, 21)

In my interview with Aida I questioned him as to whether he thought today's youth were 'moratorium'.

> Nowadays, moratorium has become commonplace. That book was published in [19]77, and in those days there were hard working students, hard working people, and only a very small number of rich kids. But then, even when they aren't rich, the number of people who are just hanging around is increasing. This was probably shocking. But 'moratorium' is an obsolete word now, we don't use it much. Recently we say '*pûtarô*' [unemployed/slacker]. But now as we're in a recession, today's youth are more serious than I was when I was that age. (Aida interview 2004)

Aida's position seems to be, rather than one of outright criticism, one that creates the most antagonism.

Aida Makoto's installation *Aida Line* 1997 was shown at Takashimaya department store, which opened that year in Shinjuku. Included in a show window next to the main entrance, mannequins of a junior high school students in school uniform, one in an elementary school swimming suit which displayed a 'sexy wetness', emphasized by using glycerine.' (Aida 1999, 28)

> I wanted to produce a dark spot within the dazzling brightness of the illusory space, which is a symbol of freedom and consumption. If not a scholar nor a designer engaged directly in the economy, the artist has some social roles. And I believe one of the artist's roles is to stir up society with nonsenses for which the artist should be responsible – the role of so-called 'clowning'...The following year, in which crimes using knives occurred frequently among junior high school students, I remembered the work because at the time I produced the work I was already imagining a state of confusion for students who seemed to be living two kinds of lives every day, one in and the other outside school. (Aida 1999, 28)

This 'dark spot', the unsettling and questioning of the status quo, seems to be emblematic of Aida's works.

Could Aida's attitude recapture the spirit of Mishima Yukio's cultural criticism expressed in his 1969 essay *Bunka bôei ron* (A Defence of Culture)? It is a connection already made by Matsui Midori.

> Savage satire of post-war democratization, loathing of straight-laced middle-class morality, nihilistic acceptance of the absence of purpose in life and violent expressions of infantile or perverse sexuality, presents an interesting case in the genealogy of Japanese anti-modernism...His painting consciously reflects a worldview similar to the one expressed by Mishima. (Matsui 2002, 148)

In Mishima's essay, he denounces contemporary Japanese urban culture which he sees as being overrun by flashy pop culture and consumerism, and refers to

> the tendency to separate culture from the vitality of the bloody womb and sexual intercourse which gave it life, in order to evaluate culture has made it into something harmless and pretty, a common property of humankind – like a fountain in a public plaza. (Mishima 1969, 27)

Mishima projected his view as a challenge to the new consumer culture spawned by high growth economics. (Najita 1989, 16) Aida's various references to Mishima in his writing, in the catalogue for the 1996 exhibition 'No Future', (Murobushi, Kurumi and Aida, Makoto 2004, 52-53) and again in my interview with him, for example, certainly suggests

a correlation and this will be examined further in chapter 4.

Conclusion

This chapter sets out to provide an overview of the proliferation of cuteness in Japanese contemporary culture, from the early developments in *manga*, and *shôjo manga* in particular, to the spread of cuteness to almost all aspects of Japanese society. Because it operates on the level of the trivial and everyday, cuteness is often trivialised, and this has lead to a lack of serious research, and this chapter also sought to build a theoretical foundation and a review of the relevant literature, particularly the debate around cuteness and power relations, and gender role issues.

The main research focus was to examine how Japanese contemporary art has commented on this proliferation of cuteness in Japanese popular culture and what insights they offer to enable a clearer understanding of cuteness in Japanese popular culture and how it operates in Japanese society, focussing on the works of artists Murakami Takashi and Aida Makoto, and through interviews with them provided original research. Through an examination of Murakami's character *Mr. DOB*, the importance of cuteness to the process of commodification, which intensified during the 1980s, was examined. Also highlighted were the significance of Japan's defeat in World War II and the influence of America in the post-war period, and what has been referred to as a process of 'infantilization'. The importance of *shôjo* culture was established as a key part of contemporary Japanese popular culture.

Contemporary images of *shôjo* in works by Aida Makoto allude to the 1990s discourse of *shôjo*, which centred on passivity, consumerism, commodification, and moral and ethical emptiness, as *shôjo* became a model of the Japanese nation. Horikiri Naoto also questions whether the term *shôjo* is no longer confined to just young girls but applicable to everyone. (Horikiri quoted in Treat 1996, 281) Cuteness in this way becomes representative of the postmodern hyper-consumer scene in Japan, where contemporary capitalism has gone 'beyond even Baudrillard's consumer society, into some other 'extremely abnormal situation.' (Karatani quoted in Ivy 1989, 42)

Chapter 3 Deconstruction: art and popular culture

This chapter examines how cuteness, as an aesthetic traditionally shunned by high art, has been used by contemporary Japanese artists to invoke the mass produced kitsch object and to deconstruct the high and low of fine art and commodity object. Murakami Takashi's Pop-infused art portrays Japan`s contemporary culture as a hyper-consumer realm, the cuteness of his works flaunt their excessive display of slick craftsmanship even as they insist on presenting themselves as works of art, while his merchandising, T-shirts, stickers, badges, and objects such as the *Mr. DOB* soft toy, (Ill.3-1) participate without protest in the marketing of art, extending the confusion. 1996 was the year Murakami launched the Hiropon Factory, his studio in Asaka, Saitama, where he created his own works and `produced` young artists, a conscious reference to Andy Warhol and the attitude of making art, being an artist, as a commercial enterprise. (Murakami in Kelmachter 2002, 82) `Tokyo Pop,` was the title of the group show in 1996, which included the artists Murakami, Nara Yoshitomo, Aida Makoto and Mori Mariko, and represented a '*tâningu pointo*' (turning point) in the Japanese art scene. (Murakami quoted in Murakami and Nara 2001, 137) In the exhibition catalogue Murakami's essay 'Art is DOB' ends with the question `what is art?` (Murakami 1996a, 11)

The exhibition `Super Flat' began in Parco Gallery, Tokyo in 2000, and subsequently grew as Murakami reconstituted it for the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art in 2001, and a traveling exhibition that toured the United States after that. The exhibition at LA MOCA attracted a record level of attendance of 10,000 people at the opening, and a total aggregate audience that exceeded 95,000 and was 'close to a blockbuster show.' (Murakami 2003) The Super Flat exhibition included a mixture of artists and designers alongside Murakami, including Nara Yoshitomo, Hiromix, the animators Kanada Yoshinori and Morimoto Kioji (best known for designing the opening credits for MTV Japan, his sketches and animations take their inspiration from 17th century Japanese scrolls), *anime* and film director Anno Hideaki, *ero manga* artist Machino Henmaru and figure maker Bome. Murakami also included works by Edo period artists Itô Jakuchû, Kanô Sansetsu, Hokusai and Soga Shôhaku.

> Azuma Hiroki states 'Super Flat' is a keyword for describing Japanese society, where surface has become all-important. (Azuma 2000a, 2-10) In the 'Super Flat Manifesto' Murakami implies that, while his concept is restricted to Japan, the

3-1. Murakami Takashi, 2000
Mr DOB soft toy
Height 30 cm

3-2. Murakami Takashi, 2003
'Super Flat Monogram' exhibition invitation
Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York

3-3. Louis Vuitton, 2003
Handbag with Murakami Takashi design

> applications are global; 'the world of the future might be like Japan is today – super flat. Society, customs, art, and culture: all are extremely two-dimensional.' (Murakami 2000, 5)

Azuma argues that in the postmodern era, society has little by little been losing the value of 'depth', the value of something behind the surface, and states 'the concept of superflat is exactly and typically postmodernist.' (Azuma 2001) Super Flat certainly resonates with Frederic Jameson's concept of 'depthlessness', in his *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, where he describes,

> a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense, perhaps the supreme formal feature of all the postmodernisms to which we will have occasion to return. (Jameson 1991, 9)

Murakami's concept of Super Flat is explicitly linked to one of the key characteristics of postmodernism in which culture and society become a flux of undifferentiated images and signs. By making use of certain postmodern theorists, in this examination of a key part of Japanese contemporary art and culture, the aim is to come to a new understanding of the role cuteness plays.

This flatness of contemporary society, according to Jameson leads to the abolition of 'critical distance' in the new space of postmodernism, and this leads Jameson to question whether postmodernism is devoid of all subversiveness or social-critical value. (Jameson 1984, 125) In the same year as the Tokyo Pop exhibition, the exhibition 'Ironic Fantasy - Another World by Five Contemporary Artists' was held at The Miyagi Museum of Art. This exhibition, which Nara Yoshitomo gives preference over 'Tokyo Pop', (Murakami and Nara 2001) included Murakami Takashi, Nara Yoshitomo, Aida Makoto, Mori Mariko, and Tarô Chiezô.

> [T]he exhibition mirrors a shift in the paradigm of contemporary art from the 1980s to the 1990s. The recent works grow out of postmodern appropriation as a mode of critiquing contemporary society. (Matsui 1996b, 123)

This critique, Matsui argues, challenges the impossibility of a critical position, and Jameson's argument that it represents the incorporation by art of elements of mass or popular culture 'to the point where many of our older critical and evaluative categories (founded precisely on the radical differentiation of modernist and mass culture) no longer seem functional.' (Jameson 1984, 65)

> Whereas all art up to Pop Art was based on a 'depth' vision of the world, pop regards itself as homogeneous with this *immanent order of signs*: homogeneous

> with their industrial, mass production and hence with the artificial, manufactured character of the whole environment, homogeneous with the spatial saturation and simultaneous culturalized abstraction of this new order of things. (Baudrillard 1998, 115)

For Baudrillard Pop Art, as art liberated from the dignity of high art, has become a form of merchandise that is eminently ironic, because it no longer means anything; it is more arbitrary and irrational even than merchandise itself. (Baudrillard 1995, 18) When the art object takes on the form of merchandise, it loses its *a priori* ideal nature (beauty, authenticity, even functionality). 'Pop signifies the end of perspective, the end of evocation, the end of testimony, the end of the creative act and, last but not least, the end of the subversion of the world and the curse of art.' (Baudrillard 1998, 116)

Has art ceased to be creative or subversive, becoming merely one more set of objects to be included in the system of objects, no longer creating or contradicting the world of consumer objects, but now part of that world? According to Adorno, kitsch may even be the 'true progress' of art. (Adorno 2004, 398) Within the context of Adorno's thought this statement represents a critique of Hegel and progressive modernism, and resonates with notions of infantilization and immaturity described in chapter 2. Do Murakami's works simply replay the scene of consumerist desire, or does he create a critical position; a subversive force emanating from within the very consumerist myths he questions? A transvaluation of kitsch values or utterly tainted by them? There is still a critical view which demands that 'high art' is distinct from mass culture, contemporary artists are required to be critical. Is Murakami then just a parody of a critical position, a simulation? Even if Murakami puts forward a critical gap, is it in reality closed? We might read subversion into Murakami but would this represent simply a nostalgia for critical art as Baudrillard suggests. (Baudrillard 2001, 144) Murakami's Superflat Monogram works displayed in the gallery (Ill.3-2), while his Louis Vuitton designs are on sale, (Ill.3-3) forces the question: is there a difference between going to an exhibition and a Louis Vuitton store? By examining the key exhibitions and works, artists' statements and interviews, these are the questions this chapter aims to answer.

While flaunting an absence of depth, Murakami's works point to a variety of cultural, political, social and historical contexts concerning the relationships between high art, popular culture and subculture, between Japan and America, between contemporary art and

traditional Japanese art. Modern art and traditional arts on the one hand, and the current contemporary subculture of Japan, such as *manga*, animation and rock music, on the other. Super Flat is an art historical perspective of Japanese *manga* and animation, which questions what happened in the cultural scene in Japan after the World War II, what was born especially as a result of the influence of imported pop culture. 'With his uncanny ability to mirror his culture he is more the Japanese equivalent of Andy Warhol than someone intent on critiquing things.' (Cruz 1999, 14) The 1980s are key for this 'generation' of artists, Murakami states:

> I'm not as interested in revealing media strategy as some people in my generation. In that sense, I'm very much a child of '80s Japanese mass culture. (Murakami quoted in Matsui 1998, n.p.)

Sawaragi Noi, in his essay 'Works that reflect the environment of an age', highlights the influence and relationship of American culture, which erupted from the economic environment of the 1980s in Japan, a time when a highly developed consumption culture emerged. (Sawaragi 1996) Recently there has been more of a reciprocal flow between Japan and the West. Murakami's references to Tsuji Nobuo's book *Kisô no keifu* (Lineage of the fantastic), a study of Edo Period artists (Tsuji 1988), raises the issue of the connection of pre-modern Japan to postmodernism, in the context of this relationship.

In the 1990s Murakami and Aida Makoto made their own postmodern simulations of *Nihonga*, 'mining their cultural past for technical resources and ideological prototypes, while playing up their postmodern sensibility to the fullest advantage.' (Matsui 2001b, 47) Matsui attributes the invention of *Nihonga* as a category in the 1890s to Ernest Fenollosa and Okakura Tenshin, partly in protest to the marginalisation of traditional Japanese painting and partly

> as a vehicle for the idea of a pan-Asian cultural continuity, an eclectic adaptation and formal integration of such diverse sources as twelfth-century Chinese painting and the latest experiments of Cézanne or Monet. (Matsui 1999a, 22)

An element of cuteness is included in Murakami's work *And then and then and then and then and then* 1996-1997 (Ill.3-4), for example, as Murakami and Aida raise issues about cultural authenticity and question *Nihonga* as a contrived institutionalised national style, with its mixture of ancient painting techniques and the latest in Western approaches; a consequence of the Meiji Restoration, the national movement of modernisation and enlightenment that followed Japan's blanket acceptance of Western ideas and lifestyles.

3-4. Murakami Takashi, 1996
And then, and then and then and then and then
Acrylic on canvas mounted on board
300 x 300 cm
Private Collection

In his examination of Murakami's concept Super Flat, Azuma Hiroki takes the 1999 exhibition 'Ground Zero Japan', curated by Sawaragi Noi, as a starting point.

> In this important event Sawaragi grasped the confusion of the late 1990s – the levelling of high culture and subculture, the dissolving of borders between genres and the successive descent into irrelevance of existing learning and criticism – as 'a return to zero.' (Azuma 2000, 147)

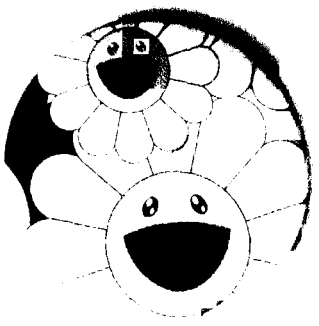
With a possible reading of the word 'super' as meaning as 'over' or 'beyond', (Azuma 2000a, 10) Murakami, in contrast,

> can be seen launching from that very same ground zero an attempt to reclaim territory for a new art at the distant border between art and non-art. The new concept of Super Flat seems to have appeared just for this purpose. (Azuma 2000, 147)

In this way cuteness is used not only to represent a flattening, but also to signify a new beginning and a sense of optimism.

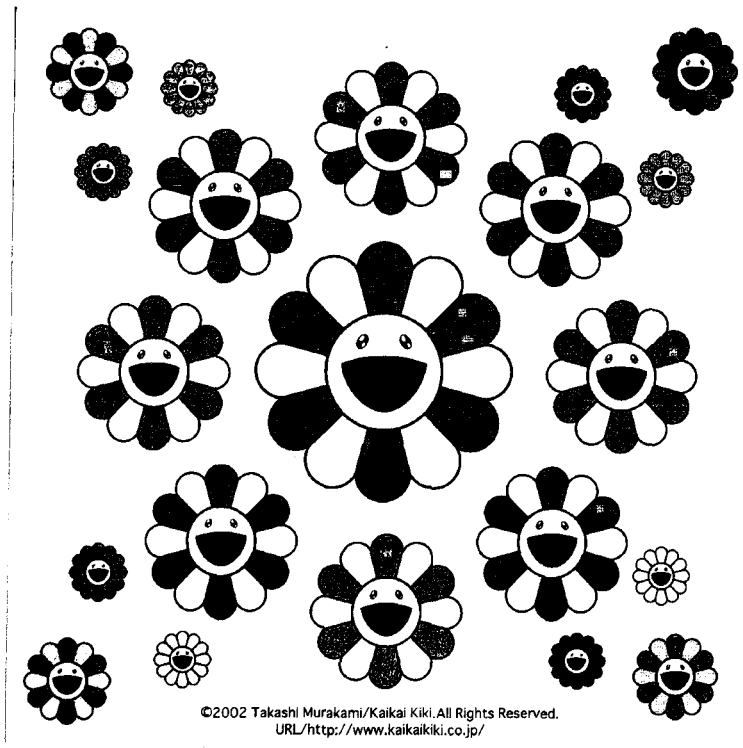
Tokyo Pop

'Lolli-Pop: the Minimalist Life', an early article by Sawaragi, which 'brilliantly revealed the critical potential of 'Neo Pop' against the hegemony of Japanese social and artistic institutions' (Matsui 1996b, 123), appeared in the journal *Bijutsu Techô*. It focuses on elements of cuteness included in Neo Pop since the 1980s as a form of social criticism. Sawaragi 'supported the new artistic method which parodically simulated the icons and functions of consumer society, disrupting its rule from within its system.' (Matsui 1996b, 124) Sawaragi highlighted Murakami's reference to 'cute' consumer objects as *manga* characters, praising their method of 'incorporating the ambiguous aspects of "cuteness" in their works in order to expose the way in which the Japanese power deploys cuteness as a weapon.' (Sawaragi 1992b, 86-92, and quoted in Matsui 1996b, 124) He saw it as a sign of the artists' commitment to difference and the possibility of effecting a 'miniscule' yet powerful protest against homogenizing institutions. (Matsui 1996b, 124) Sawaragi used the term 'simulationism' to represent the new critical tendency among contemporary artists. Using mimicry and sampling, Sawaragi argued that in adopting the semblance to cute consumer products, Neo Pop's final aim was to 'demythologize their charm through sarcastic modification.' (Matsui 1994, 35) The issue of a time gap between Western and Japanese postmodernism is discussed later in this chapter.



3-5. Fake badge, 2003

3-6. Harvey Ball, 1964
Smiley



3-7. Murakami Takashi, 2002
Smiling flowers sticker set
Kaikaikiki Inc.

A smiling flower is one of Murakami's key motifs, appearing in a number of his works, and merchandising products. This badge version (Ill.3-5), a kitsch object resembling the multitude of cute marketing icons in Japan, exudes an optimistic cuteness, and is reminiscent of the original 'happy face' icon. (Ill.3-6) The 'happy face badge' was originally a slightly fake public relations smile, crafted by the US company State Mutual Life Assurance of Worcester in 1963, a 'friendship campaign' to cover up the bad effects a merger was having on company morale. (Belson and Bremner 2004, 199) Its creator was Harvey R. Ball, an independent commercial graphics arts designer and World War II veteran, who had served in Okinawa. The smiley badges became a worldwide icon in the 1970s, when a pair of Spanish brothers copied the original, adding the slogan, 'Have a Happy Day.' The smiley face, now referred to as an *emoticon*, has seen a resurgence in popularity, as it is attached to emails, and text messaging. The smiling flower badge turns out to be a fake one, made by an underground artist to coincide with Murakami's 2002 exhibition in London as a critique of his excessive marketing, adds another twist, as Murakami is caught in his own trap, his sign pirated and made to speak against itself.

The relation of kitsch to the avant-garde is mapped out as a way of locating Murakami's concept of Super Flat.

> Most striking is the great panoply of derivative products whose production Murakami overseas: T-shirts, postcards, watch-straps, all decorated with the characters that populate his work, fast-selling, commercial pieces that are given as much weight as the one-off art. (Fetis 2002, 79-80)

The press reaction to Murakami's first shows in London and Paris in 2002 highlighted a possible lack of critique.

> This is a nasty kind of infantilism, filled with fetishistic details, playing up to its own crushing doltishness, its saccharine, sub-surreal stupidities… There's no sign of any internal critique, just a lot of very high-class production values. (Searle 2002, 16)

In Sawaragi's essay 'Lolli-Pop' is short for 'Lolita Pop', pointing to both the nonsense and infantile element of 'Pop' (Sawaragi 1992b, 86-92), elements also highlighted by Hebdige, 'POP…like DADA, infantile, nonsensical, onomatopoeic.' (Hebdige 1995, 107) In Murakami's *Haikei kimi wa ikite iru – Tokyo poppu sengen* (Hello, You are Alive: Manifesto for Tokyo Pop) he proposed using childishness one of three negative traits of contemporary Japanese culture (the others being the repression of class differences and amateurism), as a springboard for creating a new kind of beauty. (Murakami 1999, 57-59)

The relation of cuteness to the childish is an important consideration for Murakami, and resonates with Pop Art of the 1960s.

The connections with the Pop Art of the 1960s are clear when Murakami states 'I thought with Super Flat I was creating what Richard Hamilton did when he defined pop Art.' (Murakami quoted in Kaplan 2001, 95) In his reworking of Richard Hamilton's original definition of Pop ('Popular, Transient, Expendable, Low Cost, Mass produced, Young, Witty; Sexy, Gimmicky; Glamorous Big Business.') (Hamilton 1982 28), Murakami adds 'cute', 'childish' and 'erotic' in his definition of Super Flat:

> Childish (irresponsible); Introverted; Shabby; Amateurish; Cute; Ambiguous; Full of contradictions; Anti-Western; Multi-focal; Improvised; Absence of hierarchy; Plane and flat; Ephemeral; Erotic. (Murakami 2003, n.p.)

Comparing the two definitions, the addition of cuteness is one of the differences, and Takekuma Kentarô's familiar cartoon images of Thomas the Tank Engine (a project that aims to deter suicidal commuters from jumping in front of trains), for example, represents how Japan's consumer culture of cuteness is analyzed and dismantled through a variety of provocative strategies in the Super Flat exhibition.

Murakami's smiling flower stickers 2002 (Ill.3-7) recall Pop Art's humour. Pop Art's wit, irony and ambiguity keep it at a distance from kitsch. Richard Hamilton's *The Critic Laughs* 1971-2, a work comprised of a giant sized set of edible teeth (a block of sugar in the form of an upper denture) fixed onto an electric toothbrush, itself brought a recollection of Jasper Johns' sculpture *The Critic Smiles* 1959, and a strong connection to the readymade, and Duchamp's 'ironies of affirmation'. Baudrillard refers to the smile induced by Pop Art.

> In many, the works provoke a moral and obscene laugh (or hint of laugh) – the canvases being indeed obscene to the classical gaze – followed by a derisive smile…let us not forget that a *certain smile* is one of the *obligatory signs* of consumption: it no longer represents a humour, a critical distance, but is merely a reminder of that transcendent critical value which today is given material embodiment in the knowing wink…It is not really clear in the end whether this 'cool' smile is the smile of humour or that of commercial complicity. This is also the case with pop, and its smile ultimately encapsulates all its ambiguity: it is not the smile of critical distance, but the smile of *collusion*. (Baudrillard 1998, 121)

Has Murakami kept this critical smile or has parody become pastiche? Super Flat is for Murakami 'a very good marketing word.' (Murakami quoted in Kaplan 2001, 95)

Jameson states pastiche 'is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter,' and 'pastiche is blank parody that has lost its sense of humour.' (Jameson 1983, 114-116) If pastiche rather than parody is more characteristic of the postmodern, Matsui still finds value, since 'pastiche connotes the absence of order or hierarchy of values against which the chaotic aspects of contemporary reality must be measured.' (Matsui 1996b, 127) The importance of parody will be further examined in chapter 4 with regard to the subculture of *otaku*.

In 1939 Clement Greenberg published his article 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' in which he voiced his general contempt for kitsch, and argued the principles of kitsch and those of the avant-garde are diametrically opposed. (Greenberg 1965) The context of Greenberg's article, which originally appeared in *Partisan Review*, a radical left wing journal, was the struggle against fascism. He took a position which called for a distinction for 'high art' as opposed to 'kitsch', a safeguarding of aesthetics against totalitarian politics, a threat now replaced perhaps by the totalitarianism of consumerism and globalization. Fears regarding the corrupting power of popular culture have pervaded intellectual and artistic thought in the 20th century. Post World War II, Greenberg's pronouncements concerning the imminent defeat of high art at the hands of a tidal wave of kitsch, coupled with Theodore Adorno's analysis of the alienating properties of mass produced entertainment, the culture industry as he termed it, resulted in a consensus as to the evils of mass culture.

Postmodernism revisits Pop Art for its rejection of the either/or, neither saying yes or no but constantly swapping between the two. It is an interpretation that highlights Pop Art's double-coding and undecidable element, which 'resists totalising in a grand dialectical scheme.' (Maharaj 1991, 21) Sarat Maharaj sites Derrida's notion of the 'pharmakon', as both a lethal and a remedial drug as a metaphor of Pop Art's gear-switching modes and shifting stances, rather than in terms of strict, reductive oppositions, 'as either truth-drug or the opiate of mass culture, as critical purge or kitsch palliative.' (Maharaj 1991, 21) Hebdige argues that Pop Art did not break the hierarchical distinctions between 'high' and 'low', but simply blurred the line by the postmodern strategy of double coding. (Hebdige 1995, 103)

Arguably Pop Art is the first art to explore its own status as 'signed' and 'consumed' art

object, as a type of art that fits well within a society dominated by the logic of signs and consumption.

> [P]op's significance resides in the ways in which it demonstrated, illuminated, lit up in neon, the loaded arbitrariness of those parallel distinctions, lit up in neon the hidden economy which serves to valorise certain objects, certain forms of expression, certain voices to the exclusion of other objects, other forms, other voices, by bestowing upon them the mantle of Art. (Hebdige 1988, 126)

Recognising that the truth of objects and products is their brand name, the object is no longer used for something, but to signify, its use value now as a sign. It is logical for an art which does not contradict the world of objects, but explores its system, to make itself part of that system.

Super Flat has precursors in 1960s Pop Art, Robert Rauschenberg's 'flat-beds' for example. A flatness in Pop Art has also been identified by Lawrence Alloway.

> Pop artists rejected the notion of a 'tragic and timeless' art, in Rothko's phrase. They introduced current events and objects encoded in forms that were already flat: the flatness of Pop Art therefore constitutes a shift in values away from the aestheticization and upward philosophical mobility of their predecessors. (Alloway 1983, 42)

Murakami himself states that 'The start of Super Flat is Andy Warhol's camouflage painting.' (Murakami quoted in Kaplan. 2001, 95)

> The message in a Lichtenstein painting or a Warhol print or the Bailey photograph is that in this art, as in 'mass art', 'the art lies on the surface.' 'Its secret depth,' to use his words again, 'is that it has no secret depth'. In Warhol's words, 'There's nothing behind it'. (Hebdige 1988, 135)

Pop Art was fine art dealing with consumerism, and attempted to break down the great divide between fine art and mass culture. Dick Hebdige, referring to Pop Art stated that

> Excellence, distinction, uniqueness – the three prerequisites for entry to the fine art canon – wiped out, flattened down to an undifferentiated sequence of images which reproduces the 'flow' of television. The great frame of life reduced to the flat dimensions of a comic strip frame, a television screen. (Hebdige 1988, 137)

While art has engaged with popular culture previously, DADA for example, and certain postmodern strategies can be traced back to earlier artists such as Duchamp, Pop Art signals the start of a break from modernism which tried to keep popular culture at arms length. In this way Pop Art represents the pause between modernism and postmodernism.

Has art now taken on the appearance and secularity of other forms of pop entertainment?

Blame for erasing the distinction between respectable art and kitsch has been placed more recently on postmodernism, where the logic of consumption eliminates the traditional sublime status of artistic representation. (Baudrillard 1998, 115) Baudrillard argues that art has been reduced to merely repeating itself at an ever-increasing speed. (Baudrillard 1993, 15) There is an historical link between the exhaustion of the furiously anti-traditional avant-garde and the emergence of the postmodern willingness to revisit the past.

> Abandoning the strictures of the avant-garde and opting for a logic of renovation rather than radical innovation, postmodernism has entered into a lively reconstructive dialogue with the old and the past. (Calinescu 1987, 276)

Should the temporal significance of an artist now be located within the field of cultural anthropology or perhaps media communications? 'I make art that isn't about high culture versus low culture. Our reality is that everything is visual culture,' states Murakami. (Griffin 2001, 188)

Murakami refers to Super Flat as a form of 'post Pop Art' or a 'descendant of Pop.' Japanese cultural expressions are still catching up with the ideas and trends of the American 1980s argues Murakami, 'with thirty years' time lag, we've just discovered the joys of making pop Art for ourselves.' (Murakami quoted in Matsui 1998, n.p.) However, this is more than a mere delayed Japanese version of Pop Art. (Murakami 1999, 57-59)

> [W]e should realize the fact that post-war Japan was culturally 'occupied' by America, and if the artists are expressing 'pop' culture, that may be considered a 'colonial pop culture' of the Far East. Needless to say, I am not using this phrase in a negative way. The closed realm of 'contemporary art' was established by ignoring such an influence, creating an institutional enclosure despite the fact that that influence was total. (Sawaragi 1996, n.p.)

At that time, Murakami felt that Japan was attaining financial power conducive to the development of pop culture, and that it was the right moment for the development of a real 'pop culture', 'something analogous to Pop Art as Warhol conceived of it – in other words, art expressing the 'dark side' of American society. (Murakami in Kelmachter 2002, 93) Murakami faces the American influence on Japanese popular culture signalling his successful evolution from the resentment of American pop culture to the affirmation of contemporary Japanese reality.

The new Pop marks a clear break with the previous practices of Japanese contemporary art,

according to Sawaragi in his book *Nihon Gendai Bijutsu* (Japanese Contemporary Art) 1998. Sawaragi criticised the post-war Japanese avant-garde for its failure to interact with the reality of contemporary life. Absorbing the vulgar energy of mass culture while possessing cool irony, Sawaragi sees the emergence of the new Pop art in the early 1990s as the first real opportunity to break open the closure of Japanese art, which he blamed on preceding generations of Japanese artists and critics for indulging in a false game of 'authenticity' and 'deviation' in a closed circuit, which bore no relevance to international art history. (Matsui 2001b, 48)

The works of the artists in the exhibition 'Ironic Fantasy' were 'a conscious restatement, from an '80s viewpoint, of the simultaneous attraction to and critique of consumer culture latent in the expressions of the original Pop Art.' (Matsui 1996b, 123) Matsui makes the comparison of Murakami to Jeff Koons. Sawaragi also compares Murakami to Koons, and Nara to Mike Kelley. (Sawaragi 2001b, 96-103) Murakami's collaboration figure work shown in Tokyo Museum of Contemporary Art, he argued was like Koons' flower sculpture *Puppy* 1992, while Nara's 'I Don't Mind if you Forget Me' exhibition in Yokohama included works like Mike Kelly's installations with teddy bears. These two artists appearing at the beginning of the 21st century at home and abroad were repeating the feeling of America in the late 1980s.

Murakami and Nara emerged as the two leading contemporary Japanese artists after significant success abroad. 2001 was the year of 'Narakami', a recently coined term that is shorthand for Nara and Murakami. Five hundred mostly young Japanese packed the auditorium of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, for a public conversation between the two artists, called 'The Narakami Dialogue'. Fashion magazines and art journals alike, featured specials on the two artists. The December edition of *Bijutsu Techô* featured a special report on the artists to coincide with their large-scale exhibitions held at the same time in Tokyo and Yokohama. The September 2001 issue of *Brutus,* a popular lifestyle magazine, featured a special feature entitled 'Artists Without Borders: Nara, Murakami *wa sekai gengo da!*' (Nara, Murakami are global languages!). *Eureka*, a poetry criticism journal, similarly devoted its October issue to the two artists, while newspapers and TV shows also ran articles and segments on them.

In his book *Simulationism* 1991, Sawaragi used the term simulationism to represent the new critical tendency among contemporary artists, and drew on Craig Owens' term 'appropriation' which he had used to define the method of postmodern art.

> Sawaragi projected onto the 'Neo-Pop' of the Japanese 90s the dream of uniting criticism and practice that Owens had decreed for the postmodern art of the American 80s. (Matsui 1996b, 124)

Neo Pop was making use of 'postmodern appropriation as a mode of critiquing contemporary society' (Matsui 1996b, 126) Baudrillard's essay 'The Transparency of Kitsch', had identified 'true', and 'false' simulation, in his study of Andy Warhol who he argued in 1965 was attacking the concept of originality in an original way; by 1986 he was reproducing an unoriginal in an unoriginal way.

> When Warhol painted his *Campbell's Soup Cans* in the 1960s, this was a sensational coup, both for simulation and for modern art. At a stroke, the merchandise object, or the merchandise sign was consecrated by the only ritual we have left, that of transparency. But by the time he came to paint the *Soup Cans* in 1986, the simulation was no longer sensational but stereotypical. (Baudrillard 2001, 20)

In 1965 the whole aesthetic trauma of the invasion of art by merchandise was conveyed in a way both 'ascetic and ironic', by 1986 none of this remained, 'the genius of promotion presided over a new phase of merchandising.' (Baudrillard 2001, 20)

Murakami also refers to simulationism, which he cites as an influence in the early 1990s when he first moved to New York.

> In those days the art world was in the transition from New Painting to Simulationism, and I was influenced by both tremendously. My goal was to present a mixture of Anselm Kiefer and Jeff Koons. I made installations of plastic soldiers around that time. (Murakami quoted in Kelmachter 2002, 3)

In the late 1980s Jeff Koons, the expert of kitsch, had used an inflatable bunny, *The Pink Panther*, and other images of cuteness that openly embraced an attitude that was to extend, severely, the operations of the Duchampian ready-made to a range of consumer products comprised almost exclusively of kitsch. Koons himself had worked on Wall Street as a stockbroker, his sculpture *Pink Panther* 1988 represents an antithesis of art. In 1989 he mounted 'The Banality Show', consisting of life-size porcelain and polychromed wood sculptures fabricated by skilled craftsmen. These sculptures were so blatantly banal they were metamorphosed into 'hyperkitsch.' Reversibility, turning around people's sensibilities is a key feature of the avant-garde. When an artist reverses institutionalised

norms, and artistic practices which exclude a certain grammar, just as Warhol's factory questioned the notion of the studio as the centre of artistic creation, and Eduardo Paolozzi's *Kitsch Cabinet* 1970 included his collection of childhood toys, this can also represent avant-garde artistic practice.

In 1980 the exhibition 'Duchamp and 20th Century Art – after art stripped bare' at Tokyo University Komaba Art Museum, included new unedited notes and manuscripts in which the word '*inframince*' appeared. Duchamp first began to elaborate *inframince* in 1937. It is a word that doesn't exist in French, but is composed of the word *infra* (low) and *mince* (thin), and means a distance or a difference you cannot perceive, but can only imagine. The difference between the bottle rack selected by Duchamp and every other bottle rack, for example. 'Instead of using 'super' which would express the extra thin, Duchamp chooses the opposite 'infra' meaning below rather than above', (Ades, Cox & Hopkins 1999, 183) but there are similarities with Murakami's notion of Super Flat. In the Parisian journal *Preuves* in 1968, Duchamp refers to 'the hollow in the paper between the front and back of a thin sheet of paper.' (Duchamp quoted in Sanouillet and Peterson 1973, 194) He also refers to 'the interface between two types of thing', 'a kind of interface or state of being inbetween', and 'a gap or shift that is virtually imperceptible but absolute.' (Ades, Cox & Hopkins 1999, 183) Duchamp's usage suggests a going beyond binary oppositions. It is quite subversive. Although there is no longer any possibility of Murakami's concept being able to operate in the same way, there is a similarity with Duchamp's concept, perhaps a more introverted version of Murakami's extroverted version, but still reflecting the miniscule space left for critique in art.

There are other instances of the use of a similar flat strategy elsewhere in the 1990s. For example, in 'Easyfun', the Jeff Koons exhibition in 1999 at Sonnabend Gallery New York, his works were described as 'unapologetically flat.' (Gingeras 2001, 85)

> The legacy of Pop is more than obvious in *Easyfun*: their pristine surfaces recall the perfectionism of Roy Lichtenstein, while their most obvious debt is owed to James Rosenquist, whose long engagement with advertising vocabulary and sign-board painting technique was acknowledged by Koons as a key reference for these works. (Gingeras 2001, 85)

In a conversation between Jeff Koons and James Rosenquist published in *Parkett* 2000, Koons states 'it is so much of our culture, you are on your computer screen and there is one layer of images on top of another layer of images.' (Rosenquist 2000, 40) This

resonates with Murakami's concept of Super Flat, which in his Super Flat manifesto, he likens to the merging of flat layers in the creation of a desktop graphic on a personal computer. (Murakami 2000a, 5) This particular association of the Super Flat with screens and computer technology will be examined further in chapter 7.

Returning to Murakami's smiling flowers, these entered mass consciousness when the results of his collaboration with Louis Vuitton went on sale in February 2003. Murakami's new design for the bags range from a simple rendering of the familiar logo in bright colors, to cartoons of smiling blossoms, eyes and pandas that look as if they have been painted over the classic monogram. Outside the venue at the Louis Vuitton catwalk show in Paris, where the bags were unveiled, huge balloons of the artist's characters crowded the skyline.

The illustrations also feature cherry blossoms, a traditional symbol of Japan, and perhaps a reference to the first Louis Vuitton flower and circle design introduced in 1896, which was inspired by *Japonisme*, the post-Impressionists' re-interpreting of the Japanese aesthetic in the decorative arts, which was popular in Paris at the beginning of the 20th century. Lise Skov argues that in the concept of *Japonisme* there is an idea of a binary opposition, *Japonisme* as 'exotica' and 'postmodernism's promise of a collapse of cultural hierarchies.' (Skov 1996, 139) The point is, not to recover the origin, or nature of postmodernism, but focus on 'the synchronism of a number of occurrences which can be loosely grouped around the concept.' (Skov 1996, 140)

While the increasing popularity of *manga* and *anime* might perhaps represent a new *Japonisme*, a new confidence for Japan, Murakami worries if the collaboration might be too much for his own home market. Louis Vuitton, one of the best selling designer labels in Japan, is a high status brand, with an exclusivity not seen in normal consumer goods, often with limits on the number of items a customer is allowed to buy at any one time, for example. 'The people at Japanese Louis Vuitton and I were wondering, if it has been touched by a Japanese creator, can it keep its value for the Japanese people?' he says. (Porter 2002, 8)

The new bag designs highlight a change in Murakami's position since his early works. The *Randoseru Project* 1991 was a set of *randoseru* (children's leather backpacks) produced

under the artist's direction. One set of eight backpacks replicates the simple design in exotic animal skins including caiman, cobra, ostrich, hippopotamus and whale, a gesture that also connects these conceptual artworks to the elegant luxury leather goods marketed to those with increasing disposable income. Murakami traces the form of this ubiquitous grade school uniform accessory to Meiji-era military design, and links it to the lingering symbolism of the Imperial system and militarism in the national education program. He also alludes to the historic discrimination against *Burakumin* leatherworkers. Murakami himself suggests a change alluding to a shift from earlier more cultural concerns.

> Now my concept is more pure: I want to make what I like to make. Right now the young female audience is the hardest to attract, and the challenge of my newest work is to get popular with that group.
> (Murakami quoted in Friis-Hansen 1999, 31)

An *Invitation* magazine cover shows the widespread coverage the Louis Vuitton collaboration received in Japan. (Ill.3-8) Murakami's designs on haute couture bags, his entering into high fashion design blurs the distinction between an artistic statement on the lines of a multiple edition readymade on the one hand, pure commodity object on the other. Following the success of the collection with Louis Vuitton, Murakami, in a collaboration with animator Hosoda Mamoru and producer Takashiro Tsuyoshi, also created a Louis Vuitton animation, which Hosoda refers to as a promotional video, (Nagae 2003, 43-45) but Louis Vuitton CEO Yves Carcelle refers to as more of an independent artistic work, funded by Louis Vuitton as acontribution to contemporary art. Again the status is confused. Takashiro refers to the cuteness of the characters in the animation, and Hosoda, while acknowledging cuteness has recently spread all over the world, expresses doubts over the girl, the main character, who should have been older, more sophisticated. There is an *otaku* element, a reference to Miyazaki's *anime Nausica of the Valley of the Wind* 1984, in that the girl is possibly not wearing underwear. According to Murakami, when the panda eats the girl in the film, and she enters the fantasy world, and flies around, it is not Alice's wonderland, but rather represents contemporary Japan, and a certain sense of weightlessness, which is a feature of current Japan. (Nagae 2003, 43-45)

> The final destination of pop art, pop imagery and pop representational techniques lies not inside the gallery but rather in that return to the original material, that turning back towards the source which characterised so much of pop art's output in its 'classic' phases. Its final destination lies…in the generation, regeneration not of Art with a capital 'A' but of popular culture with a small 'p.c.' (Hebdige 1988, 87)

3-8. *Invitation*, April 2003
Magazine cover

3-9. *Kitty Goods Collection*, 2003
Magazine cover vol. 21

When an edition of *Kitty Goods* magazine mimics Murakami's design (Ill.3-9), the kitsch/avant-garde debate comes full-circle. Murakami takes this one step further still withhis exhibition in New York 2003, which featured works based on his Louis Vuitton designs, made into canvases.

The possibility of a way for art to maintain an element of critique is significantly held out by Baudrillard, who finds 'Warhol's position particularly interesting, when he holds up the mirror of a utopia based on sheer banality.' (Baudrillard 2001, 148)

> Warhol interests me because he develops a media orientated, mechanical strategy. It's consistent with the strategy of the system, but faster than the system itself. It doesn't dispute the system, but it pushes it to the point of absurdity, by overdoing its transparency. (Baudrillard 2001, 148)

In Baudrillard's 'Absolute Merchandise', for the exhibition 'Andy Warhol: Paintings 1960-1986' in 1995 at The Museum of Fine Arts (Baudrillard 1995, 18-21), he states:

> Faced with the modern challenge of merchandise, art can find no salvation in a critical posture of denial (which would reduce it to 'art for art's sake', risibly and ineffectually holding up a mirror to capitalism and the inexorable advance of commerce). Its salvation lies in taking to extremes the formal, fetishistic abstraction of merchandise, the magical glamour of exchange value. Art must become more mercantile than merchandise itself: more remote from use value than ever before, art must take exchange value to extremes and thus transcend it.
> (Baudrillard 1995, 18)

Does Murakami in the Louis Vuitton project represent this spiral out of control, a postmodern art taking 'the media modes and commodity forms of late capitalism to 'new critical extremes'? (Ivy 1989, 43) Even in late capitalist cultures like Japan, the possibility of a critical gap in this way might still exist.

In Peach Wonderland: cuteness and kitsch

Kitsch often conjures up images of a fairy tale fantasy world, and cuteness is an aesthetic it makes use of. This kitsch utopia is evident in works such as Murakami's *Kaikaikiki In Peach Paradise* 2002, for example. There is also a socio-political aspect, and this section will examine kitsch with relation to class and power status from a number of different perspectives. Following these interpretations of kitsch it is necessary to look at how Japanese contemporary art entered the discourse of kitsch and its relation with cuteness.

Sawaragi Noi traces the 'obsession' with cuteness in Japan to the post-war Emperor Hirohito, whom in the 1980s his subjects saw as 'a cute old man'. Sawaragi claims that this attitude was a manipulative 'rule by cuteness' rather than 'rule by power.' (Sawaragi 1992, 75)

> Noting that the same surreptitious mode of rule characterized the Japanese imperial and consumer systems, Sawaragi singled out the quality of 'cuteness' as one the most effective vehicles of that rule. (Matsui 1994, 35)

In this way the political 'infantilisation' as discussed by Asada (Asada 1989, 273-278) is mirrored by an aesthetic infantilism.

Reducing adults to children, the view that kitsch makes masses easier to manipulate by reducing their cultural needs to the easy gratification offered by Disney cartoons, pulp literature and romance novels, kitsch was given a new set of meanings by the critics of 'mass culture', who used kitsch to criticize the culture of the new 'consumer society'. Kitsch was no longer blamed for the erosion of elite or regional culture, but for the manipulation of the consciousness of the masses, controlling their thoughts and cultural outlooks. Through a kitsch bombardment of comic books, radio, TV shows and movies expressing manufactured emotional, aesthetic and social outlooks, they argued the same propaganda tactics that had worked so well for fascists and communists were operative in the kitsch of American capitalism and mass culture, draining the minds of consumers and ultimately cultivating a subordination to authority.

Japanese contemporary artists, with their inclusion of popular culture and cuteness in their works, and Sawaragi plays up the importance of Murakami and the Tokyo Pop artists.

> Murakami's deployment of 'cute' images, coupled with the virtues of fine craftsmanship, allowed him to mimic and expose how political hegemony was consolidated in Japan: through seduction; by 'innocent' immersion into the emotional, national totality. (Matsui 1996, 69)

Murakami's works point to a deconstruction of the use of cuteness as constructing a sensibility in Japanese society rather than just reflecting it.

In Japan, Murakami points out, 99% of the population believes it belongs to the middle class. 'One could say it is a "superflat society." Therefore this notion of superflat is no longer confined to a word describing a form of visual art.' (Murakami 2003) This resonates with Baudrillard when he states,

> I'd say the masses are the supreme kitsch product. At the same time the masses are a mirror of power that has itself become kitsch. So we are no longer talking about subversion by the masses. We're talking about the disqualification of power by its extension to the masses. This produces a sort of perverse contract between power and the masses, a mutually manipulative contract. (Baudrillard 2001, 146)

Baudrillard refers to kitsch's 'socially assigned function of translating social class aspirations.' (Baudrillard 1998, 111) Consumer choice is a 'production of signs' that distinguishes one person from another, not as individuals but as members of classes enjoying different status levels.

Murakami's 'over-the-top cuteness' (Searle 2002, 16) suggests a critical position by exaggeration.

> Just as too much sugar will poison you in the end, so prolonged immersion in this *Play School* version of Arcadia makes your mind hurt. There's a fine line between cute and creepy...there are signs that Murakami knows full well that the Japanese cult of *kawaii* or 'cuteness', is not entirely benign, that it's a people eater. (Denny 2002, 42)

Cuteness in the works of Murakami and the other artists in the 'Ironic Fantasy' exhibition, 'are surrounded by a strange and not quite so funny or innocent laughter.' (Damianovic 1996, 130) According to Maia Danianovic 'the implied happiness of the image is challenged by an insidious presence of intuitive distress.' (Damianovic 1996, 130)

In Japanese gift giving, as a marker of the status of the receiver, kitsch fulfils a certain social function (Hendry 1993), while also in Japanese home decorating, Western style kitsch is also used as a mark of status, associated with high status, expense, refined taste. (Rosenburger 1994, 106-125) Kitsch and cuteness are not limited to Japan but in this way represent a global aesthetic.

How is cuteness in particular involved in the deceptive nature of kitsch? Kitsch makes use of cuteness as a superficial surface layer that elicits a strong emotional response. Underlying the charge that kitsch gives us a false and fraudulent, overly sweet and benign vision of the world, is the suspicion that kitsch and sentimentality are modes of distraction and self-deception, shifting our attention away from the world as it is and soothing us instead with objects that are uncompromisingly comfortable and utterly unthreatening.

> Kitsch turns its failures into cute: cutely conventional, quaintly repetitive. Its dishonesty, its derivation and its apparent failure to be original are transformed into

> a charming gesture of sincerity and a self-conscious effort to affect the sincere appeal of naiveté. (Binkley 2000, n.p.)

Rather than an aesthetics of 'beauty and originality', kitsch offers an aesthetics of simulation, objects that reproduce, imitate, ape, and repeat, what has even been called an 'aesthetics of deception and self-deception', a 'specifically aesthetic form of lying.' (Calinescu 1987, 229)

Kitsch objects, which are described by Baudrillard as 'pseudo-objects' which, while they have a superabundance of signs, lack any real signification, and represent 'a glorification of the detail and a saturation by details.' (Baudrillard 1998, 110)

> This language of kitsch is less about real circulation than about the illusion of signs through their appearance and disappearance. Like all media, it turns on and off. It spins. It offers an allurement but remains essentially static. It has no experimental dimension. It is visual culture. (Morgan 1998, 23)

Just as advertisers manufacture a simulated intimacy, kitsch is a marketable illusion. 'Is the false representation of the world offered by kitsch just a lie, or does it satisfy man's thirst for illusion?' (Eco 1989, 183)

Nishiyama Minako's *Nice Little Girl's Wonderful Dressing-up Room* 1992, (Ill.3-10) accentuates escapism as a key part of kitsch, 'kitsch as a pleasurable escape from the drabness of modern quotidian life' (Calinescu 1987, 229) Broch points out how kitsch expresses that escape as a dreamy experience of happiness, tranquility and sugary harmony, and a flight into comfort, (Broch 1970, 63) Nicholas Bornoff also points to this escapist function of kitsch with reference to love hotels which are often the absolute in kitsch.

> The primary function of the décor is escapist. Like Disneyland, the love hotel has about it an air of childishness, of innocence, which not even a strong undercurrent of rapacious commercialism can belie. (Bornoff 1991, 50)

This aspect of cuteness and kitsch has not been ignored by artists in Japan, and is not limited to the Tokyo Pop artists, more recently, kitsch and cuteness has been a subject for Japanese contemporary artists.

The 2001 exhibition 'Promenade in Asia – Cute and Kitsch' at Art Tower Mito and Shiseidô Gallery, Tokyo, proposed that freed from its elitist underpinnings, kitsch has

3-10. Nishiyama Minako, 1992
Nice Little Girl's Wonderful Dressing-up Room
Acrylic on wooden panels, one way mirror, cloth
Photo Kurosawa Shin
From Asai and Higuchi (eds.) 2001, p75

3-11. *Big Comic*, August 20, 2003
Manga cover

proven more effective a term for describing the strange euphoria of the synthetic that still characterizes much of consumer culture, and that 'yearning for what is cute is not merely trying to escape from the present difficult situation, but to value ephemeral happiness that is beaming at the moment.' (Asai 2001, 52) The exhibition stressed that the term of 'cute' describes an ambiguous feeling of happiness combined with anxiety:

> We are not using 'cute' not merely in the sense of being charming, lovely, or sickeningly sweet, but also to mean the fervent desire of artists to impact their works with an evanescent feeling of being happy 'right now and here' – a feeling that may be lost at any moment. (Asai 2001, 55)

Dana Friis-Hansen suggests this 'lite happiness' is needed because of all the recent bad news in Japan, such as the burst economic bubble, and the *Aum* sect, and asks if cuteness is a panacea or placebo? (Friis-Hansen 1999, 30-41)

Murakami argues that the Japanese preference for cuteness reflects a wish for the birth of new life. 'The notion of *kawaii* is extremely positive. It expresses the luminous side of an enchanted world.' (Murakami 2002, 11) Mori Mariko also suggests in my interview with her the importance of optimism.

> I think those *otaku* things actually obviously had started much earlier, but in fact after the economic bubble the phenomenon of cuteness was even more exaggerated I think, so optimism. (Mori interview 2004)

'Happiness: A Survival Guide for Art and Life', the inaugural exhibition at Mori Art Museum, Tokyo in October 2003, showed Yoko Ono's fifty-one minute film *Film No.5 (Smile)* 1968 which includes a close up of John Lennon's face slowly breaking into a smile. The exhibition also included an installation by Murakami in which he completely covered a room in smiling cosmos flowers. The same icons lead viewers from outside to the gallery, while the floor guide booklet also features Murakami characters, and the museum shops sell a whole variety of Murakami soft toys, stickers, postcards and other merchandising.

A recent cover of the manga *Big Comic Original* illustrates how cuteness is used as a key component of kitsch to create a strong impact, a kind of emotional intensity, or sentimentality. (Ill.3-11) Kitsch raises up an image of happiness to an absolute universal value, kitsch joy is the most fundamental form of human happiness that enlivens us all. (Binkley 2000, 131-152) This 'idiotic tautology' is captivating in its ability to elevate the unique charm of the commonplace to a value of universal significance. (Binkley 2000, 135) Thomas Kulka argues that it is the sentimental force rather than the aesthetic

properties of kitsch that accounts for its mass appeal. (Kulka 1996) Typical consumers of kitsch are pleased not only because they respond spontaneously, but also because they know they are responding in the right kind of way. They know they are moved in the same way as everybody else. This psychological aspect of kitsch was stressed by Milan Kundera:

> Kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says: How nice to see children running on the grass! The second tear says: How nice to be moved together with all mankind, by children running on the grass! It is the second tear that makes kitsch kitsch. (Kundera 1984, 72)

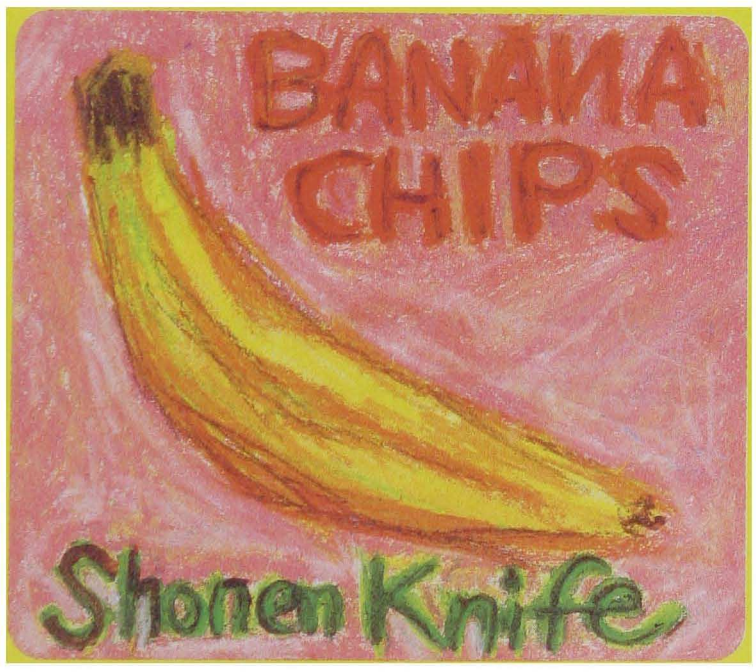
This universal appeal takes on added significance when marketing crosses international borders. Kitsch is the result of an overly mediated culture and is totally endemic to the current state of transition as we move toward globalization. (Morgan 1998, 26)

Nara Yoshitomo

Nara's exhibition 'Lullaby Supermarket' was the same year as the Super Flat exhibition, and Nara merchandising is also highly visible in museum shops. (Ill.3-12) Nara, is like Murakami, represented by Koyama Gallery in Japan, but perhaps this gives a wrong impression of Nara, who 'unlike Pop maestro Warhol, or Murakami,' (Trescher 2001b, 105) is less interested in marketing, and does not delegate work. Nevertheless Nara maintains a high public visibility with collaborative projects such as Japanese rock group Shônen Knife's *Banana Chips* CD cover, a simple banana similar to Andy Warhol's famous cover for The Velvet Underground. (Ill. 3-13) Novelist Yoshimoto Banana's book *Hinagiku no jinsei* (The Life of Hinagiku) 2000, is a collaboration between the two artists, combining Yoshimoto's text and Nara's illustrations. Yoshimoto also contributed to the 2001 'Lullaby Supermarket' exhibition catalogue with her essay 'The Lines He Draws.' (Yoshimoto 2001, 47-8)

The low status associations with 'illustration' in Nara's works challenge traditional high art values. Steven Trescher argues that Nara's work draws on 'Modernism's reductive abstraction, a sign-like, shorthand language of images with which 20th century children's book illustrations were produced', and is 'indebted to picture books by Dick Bruna.'

3-12. Nara Yoshitomo, 2000
Ashtray, clock, book ends



3-13. Nara Yoshitomo, 1998
Banana Chips
Shonen Knife CD cover
Universal Victor Inc., Japan

(Tresher 2001, 10) Straight black lines and simple blocks of colour, an illustration shows Dick Bruna's character *Miffy* at the gallery and looking at what appears to be a Van Doesburg. (Ill.3-14) The book tells of *Miffy*'s puzzlement. Could she perhaps be questioning the representation of abstract reality in neo plasticism, or the similarities with the reality of her own design?

Bruna painted *Miffy*'s black lines by brush, his great inspirations being not illustrators, but painters such as Fernand Léger and Matisse. Pablo Picasso and Dick Bruna were said to be admirers of each other's work. Murakami himself has stated there's a similarity between art and character design. (Murakami and Nara 2001) Murakami's illustrations in the book *Keba Keba* 2004 puts himself in the role of illustrator in a collaboration with the pop group Uzu's Kitagawa Yûjin who wrote the story, after Uzu had earlier used Murakami's *Vacance d'eté de moi et petit frère et Doraemon* 2002, as a CD cover. *Keba Keba* features *Kumo-kun* (Mr. Cloud) 2002, (Ill.3-15) a character who also appeared in Murakami's exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery in 2002, and is reminiscent of the Hakuyôsha laundry company icon, (Ill.3-16) and a *manga* speech bubble.

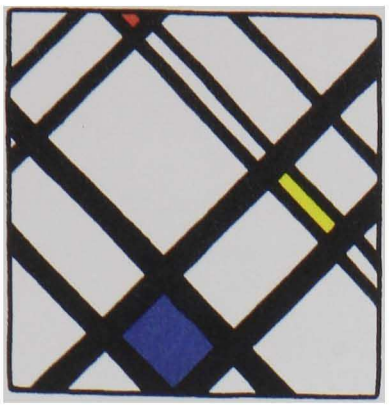
Wada Kôichi argues in media such as *manga*, *anime* and illustrations for children's books, 'an alternative mode of expression is adopted for the purpose of immediately communicating the "cuteness" of mass produced images', which involves varieties of omission, simplification, distortion, and stereotyping. (Wada 1996, 135)

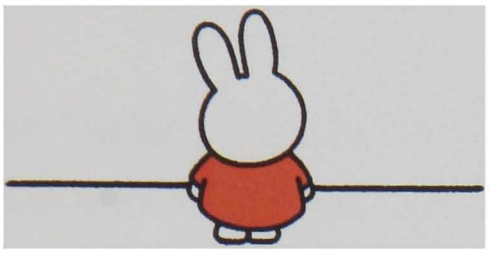
> It is obvious that Nara Yoshitomo is trying to employ such popular expressions with even more exaggeration and repetition in the context of art so that the difference among such expressions can be mixed. (Wada 1996, 135)

Nara's 'knowing use of the figures' defiant glower, and deliberately adopting clichés 'to gain reverse affects,' (Wada 1996, 135) are examined with relation to nostalgia in chapter 5.

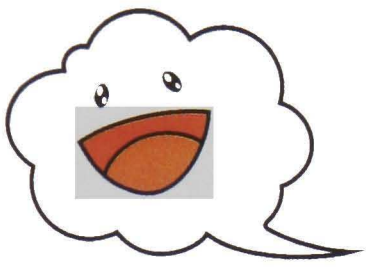
Matsui, who is critical of the frequent comparisons of Nara's style to cartoons and illustrations, wrote a 'reply to Trescher'.

> In spite of several worthy attempts to evaluate his inheritance from both contemporary art and cartoons, many critical writings indicate a difficulty of negotiating between the author's intuitive empathy with Nara's figuration and critical demands of contemporary art history. (Matsui 2001, 168)





3-14. Dick Bruna, 1997
From *Miffy at the Gallery* 1998, n.p.
London: Egmont Books



3-15. Murakami Takashi, 2002
Kumo-kun (Mr. Cloud)
Acrylic, synthetic resins, fibreglass, wood
70 x 80 x 35 cm

3-16. *Hakuyôsha*, 2002
Street sign Shibuya
Photo the author

Matsui argues Nara is contemporary art, belonging to the family of 'strange figuration', citing examples such as Balthus, and Japanese expatriate painters in America in the 1920s such as Yasuo Kuniyoshi and Toshio Shimizu, who she argues, reclaim 'the importance of personal emotion and pictorial influences outside the modern rationalist representation.' (Matsui 2001, 168) The naïve qualities of Nara's work 'enhances the style's poetic concentration and its capacity to incur the viewer's imaginative projection.' (Matsui 2001, 168)

Murakami refers to Takehisa Yumeji, a very popular painter who is more often regarded as an illustrator in Japanese art history. (Murakami 2001a, 135) Takehisa went through a period, where unable to make ends meet, he tried to create a design studio, becoming a full-time designer. He ended up designing hand towels, featuring mushrooms and floral designs, which were 'quite cute' kitsch. (Murakami 2001a, 135) With reference to Nara Yoshitomo, Sawaragi also refers to Takehisa.

> This isn't the first time characters have been popular in Japan. For example, the hanging scrolls of Takahashi Yuichi, the women, sunflower goods, books, design of Takehisa Yumeji etc, Japan has a PhD in character culture.
> (Sawaragi 2001b, 96-103)

The extent of a barrier between commercial art and fine art in Japan, is raised by these artists as a contested issue which has a long history dating back to the 19th century.

At the opening of his exhibition 'Takashi Murakami: summon monsters? open door? heal? or die?' at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo in 2001, Murakami staged a *matsuri*, a traditional Japanese style party, a playoff between contemporary art and traditional Japanese culture, drawing in folk art and crafts, making specially designed fans which doubled as tickets for the exhibition, and various promotional goods such as traditional *happi* coats, which were on sale, transforming the gallery shop into something more like a typical *onsen* (hot spring) resort souvenir shop. In a conversation between Tsuji Nobuo and Murakami published in *Bijutsu Techô*, Tsuji referring to this mixture of traditional craft and fine art, questions whether plum and pine can interact in an allusion to the traditional Japanese hierarchy of *matsu*, *take*, *ume* (pine, bamboo, plum), where *matsu* is the highest and *ume* the lowest. Tsuji points to the difference between a *matsuri* and an art gallery opening night, and likens it to the difference between plum (lowest) and pine (highest). (Yagi 2001, 46-54) At the same time Tsuji argues that Japanese art originally made no

clear distinction between painting and craft, and that the achievement of highly artistic expression in both categories is a major characteristic of Japanese art. Although there was, even in the Meiji era, an artistic hierarchy in Japan, between for example Kanô painters and pottery, Tsuji argues an intimate relationship between painting and craft was repressed after the Western idea of fine art was imported in the late 19th century at the inception of the modernising, or Enlightening process brought about by the Meiji Restoration. The often cited argument that the dichotomy of high and low in Japanese painting began when the wholesale import of Western political and cultural institutions also resulted in the creation of art (*geijutsu*, or *bijutsu*) for the Japanese participation at the World Exposition held in Vienna in 1873, stated by Matsui for example, (Matsui 2001b, 47) is not wholly convincing. Tsuji's referencing of a Japanese hierarchical system predating this also questions the impossibility of a deconstruction of a high low divide in Japan.

In the discussion between Jacques Derrida, Asada Akira and Karatani Kôjin published in *The Asahi Journal*, as 'The Ultra Consumer society and the Role of the Intellectual,' (Asada, Derrida & Karatani 1984, 6-14) Karatani stressed a firm hierarchy of rational knowledge had not yet been established in Japan, and emphasized 'the danger of uncritically importing the philosophy of deconstruction or postmodernism, originally vehicles for criticizing the modern Western rational subject.' (Matsui 1996b, 123) Replying to the questioning of deconstruction as a viable method in Japan, Derrida points out that,

> contemporary Japan is not just made up of uniquely Japanese traditions, but it should be expected that Western models have deep roots and these are integrated into Japanese culture. (Derrida quoted in Ivy 1989, 41)

Derrida maintains that deconstruction is not a universal system and in some form can be applied in Japan. (Asada, Derrida & Karatani 1984, 6-14)

In Derrida's 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' written in 1983 in which he discusses the possible translation of the word 'deconstruction' into Japanese with Izutsu Toshiko, he states that,

> in spite of appearances, deconstruction is neither an *analysis* nor a *critique* and its translation would have to take that into consideration. It is not an analysis in particular because the dismantling of a structure is not a regression toward a *simple element*, toward an *indissoluble origin*. (Derrida quoted in Kamuf 1991, 273)

The process of deconstruction involves the use of something neither inside nor outside the structure, to show that the structure is constructed and not a truth.

It represents a decentring perhaps, and a collapse of binary oppsitions, in this case of art and commodity or art and non-art.

> Deconstruction must neither reframe nor dream of the pure and simple absence of the frame. These two apparently contradictory gestures are the very ones – and they are systematically indissociable – of *what* is here deconstructed. (Derrida 1987, 73)

The next section, through a close analysis of Murakami's exhibition and concept of the Super Flat, will attempt to identify the relation contemporary artists have with this process and continue to examine how cuteness is used to its end.

Super Flat

In the Super Flat exhibition Murakami included works by the artists Itô Jakuchû, Kanô Sansetsu and Soga Shôhaku, and again in the exhibition 'Made in Japan' at The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston in 2001 Murakami exhibited his own works along side Soga Shôhaku, highlighting the key influence of art historian Tsuji Nobuo, and in particular his book *Kisô no keifu* (the Lineage of eccentricity), in which he examines six artists from the Edo period: Iwasa Matabei, Kanô Sansetsu, Itô Jakuchû, Soga Shôhaku, Nagasawa Rosetsu, and Utagawa Kuniyoshi, artists who had not received much critical attention prior to his contextualization of their work. (Tsuji 1988) Tsuji argued their shared characteristic was the production of 'eccentric and fantastic' images, and he wrote about the concept of 'eccentricity' as revolutionary in the understanding of post-war Japanese art history. Murakami directly refers to Tsuji's book and acknowledges its influence, for example in (SCAI the Bathouse 1994, 49).

Important is how these artists 'disrupt realistic representation and narrative continuity by exaggerating the idiosyncrasies of individual lines and designs, applying ornamental stylization and playfully distorting'. (Matsui 1999a, 23) There are negative and positive functions of *kiso*.

> The negative function gave rise to eccentric, grotesque, violent and pornographic images that functioned as expressions of the Edo artists' ironic self-consciousness, their deviations from classical beauty. The positive function produced playful, popular expressions including parody. (Matsui 1999a, 29)

Matsui argues this aesthetic, identified by Tsuji and incorporated in Murakami's artwork, bears a 'fundamental resemblance to the rhetorical characteristics of postmodern representation.' (Matsui 1999a, 22)

In the 'Super Flat Manifesto' Murakami extends the lineage described by Tsuji, to *anime* and links it to his own concept of the Super Flat. 'While praising them as the avant-garde of their day, Tsuji implies a similarity to what he calls contemporary "*manga* and poster art."' (Murakami 2000b, 3)

> It is particularly apparent in the arts that this sensibility has been flowing steadily beneath the surface of Japanese history. Today, the sensibility is most present in Japanese games and *anime*. (Murakami 2000, 5)

In his conversation with Tsuji published in *Bijutsu Techô*, Murakami suggests *anime* director Miyazaki Hayao is of a higher level than many Japanese fine artists, and displays a sense of the eccentric. Murakami draws particular attention to a scene at a public bath in Miyazaki's *anime Spirited Away* 2002, where a sliding screen, he argues, references traditional Japanese *fusuma-e* (pictures on sliding screens). (Yagi 2001, 46-54)

Tsuji speaks of cuteness directly in his conversation with Murakami, when he identifies it as a key characteristic of contemporary Japan, and acknowledges the popularity of the word *kawaii* with young people. (Yagi 2001, 46-54) If China and Japan are like adult and child, states Tsuji, there's still a charm in a child's painting. Acting like a child on purpose is a rebellion, a defiance to becoming an adult, and yet children and adults can find the same things fun, and for Tsuji that's what Miyazaki is all about.

Tsuji has, in a number of his studies highlighted other, what he calls key characteristics of the Japanese artistic spirit that have relevance for this study of cuteness and kitsch. The term *kazari*, for example, which derives from 8th century poetry describing the delirious effect of adorning the hair with flowers, can be translated as 'will to decorate', but also includes notions of playfulness, humour and improvisation, (Matsui 1999a, 24) was the subject of Tsuji's study for the exhibition '*Kazari*: Decoration and Display in Japan: 15 – 19th Centuries' at the Japan Society New York, the British Museum, and the Suntory Museum in Tokyo in 2002. (Rousmaniere 2002a) Tsuji's essay for the catalogue associates *kazari* with celebrating life, and the pursuit of joy, and proposes the idea that playfulness is an important underlying principle that emerges in every age through a variety of art forms.

He refers to the childlike humour conveyed in the playful distortions of human and animal forms that occur in *oko-e* (humorous drawings) dating from the 11th century, and argues that *oko-e's* playful spirit survives in post-war Japanese *manga* and animation. (Tsuji 1986, 2001) This playful element is also evident in Murakami's work, Matsui, for example, refers to Murakami's 'total devotion to the impulse of play' in *Mr. DOB* works such as *And then, and then and then and then.* (Matsui 1996b, 125)

Murakami's flowers get mixed up with the revered traditions of Japanese screen painting in *Cosmos* 1998, (Ill.3-17) which was influenced by the composition characteristic of the Momoyama period (late 16th century), which have a very 'aggressive, exuberant quality,' and several traditional Japanese works which dealt solely with flower motifs. (Murakami quoted in Kelmachter 2002, 82) A screen by Ogata Kôrin representing Irises was later, redone in the Taishô period (1912-26), by Hayami Gyoshû, who was inspired by this screen to paint a version, taking poppies as his subject 'to create something original within the style of painting.' (Murakami quoted in Kelmachter 2002, 82)

The exhibition 'Kaikaikiki' in 2000, held in Issey Miyake's Omotesandô store, was an early materialization of Super Flat. (Ill.3-18) A continuation of the 1999 spring/summer collection in Milan, which Takazawa Naoki, designer for Issey Miyake Men, together with Murakami, created 'Pressed' - a mix of art and fashion, based on ideas about the relationship between clothes and people, and clothes and society, and how the Japanese way of thinking about fashion often seems very different to Western ideas. The name 'Kaikaikiki,' which came from Tsuji's book *Kisô no keifu*, has a double edged meaning, with specific references in Japanese history. One reading of the Chinese characters conjures up images of a bloodthirsty group of bandits of the Sengoku period, and another, the bright, colourful work of Kanô Eitoku, a famous artist of the Momoyama period. 'Kaikaikiki' also has a very cute baby-like sound, and Murakami plays off this conflict in sound and meaning, the sign and the signified, the surface of things, and an underlying reality. (Murakami in Kelmachter 2002, 87) The Issey Miyake clothing, like a number of the paintings in the Super Flat exhibition, featured cartoon images of the eyes, suggesting a viewing from more than one position. Azuma has equated these paintings with the postmodern because of this going beyond the traditional idea of perspective, and Murakami compares Western European art, where creation of three dimensional space is

3-17. Murakami Takashi, 1998
Cosmos (detail)
Acrylic on canvas mounted on board
300 x 450 cm (3 panels)
Collection Kanazawa City

3-18. Murakami Takashi, 2000
'Kaikaikiki: Super Flat' exhibition flier
Issey Miyake Men, Omotesandô Tokyo

extremely important, to Japanese art, which is 'thoroughly flat'. Images constructed along vertical and horizontal lines, reaching out toward each of the four corners of the square, representing a decentring.

Rather than a Western view, 'their approach to images is extremely Japanese, with single-perspective painting never crossing their minds,' it is 'an engagement with a visual sense that wants resolutely to remain planar.' (Murakami 2000, 15)

> That extreme planarity and distribution of power allowed the viewer to assemble an image in their minds from the fragments they gathered scanning the image. This movement of the gaze over an image is a key concept in my theory of the 'super flat'. (Murakami 2000b, 15)

In contrast to the Western classical technique of representation using 'one-point' perspective, the concept of Super Flat is based on 'multiplicity of points'. A great number of eyes look at the viewer in *Jellyfish Eyes* 2001. By drawing a large number of eyes 'I disturb the perspective, or rather, I diversify it'. (Murakami quoted in Kelmachter 2002, 5)

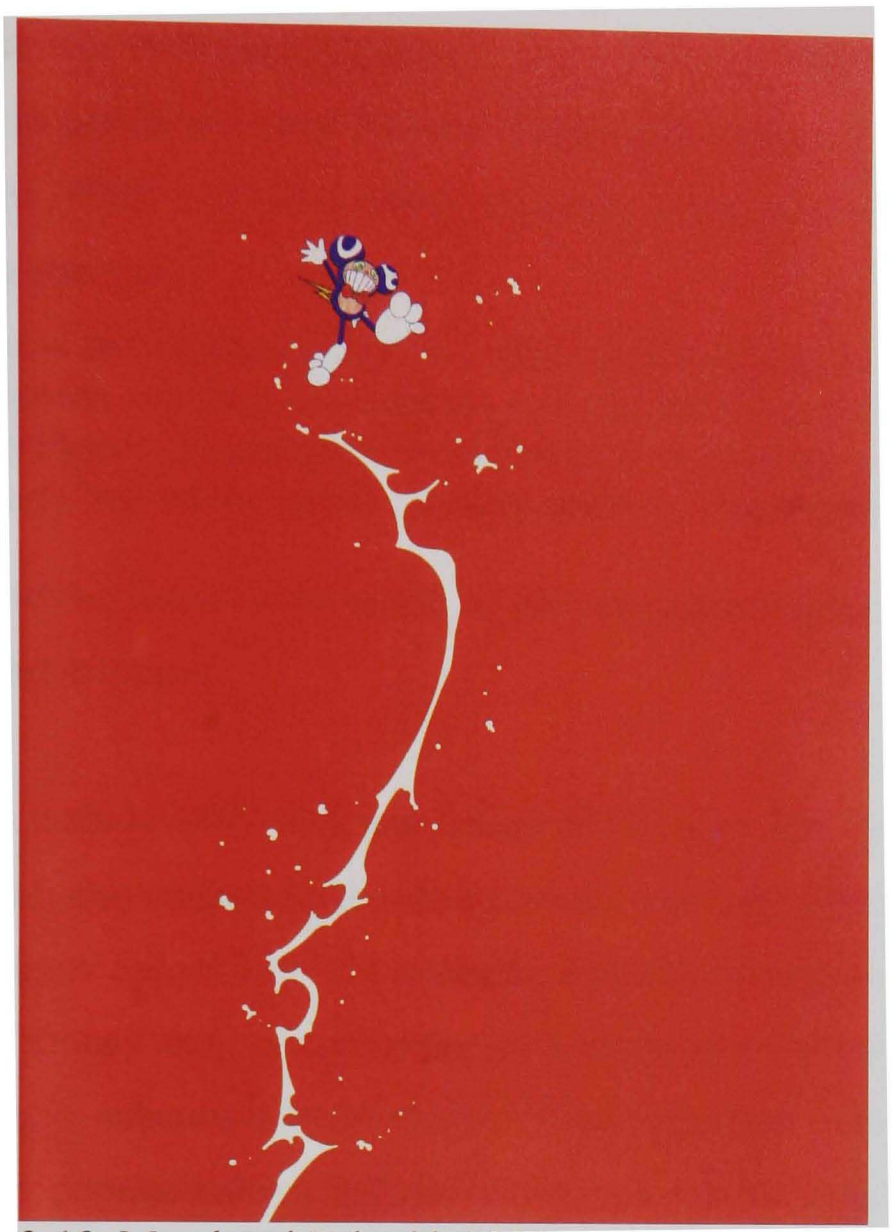
> If we connected all those eyes to a video camera or computer, then, on the control screen, we would be able to visualize another a reality that is completely different from that of single-point perspective. And that is no doubt the visual reality of our time. (Murakami quoted in Kelmachter 2002, 5)

Murakami highlights the rejection of the three dimensional view.

> Contemporary Japanese *manga* and old master prints share a sharp sense of line, both are extremely flat. It's not like *Snow White*, where the backgrounds become fuzzy to create a sense of distance. In these works everything is in focus. (Murakami quoted in Griffin 2001, 188)

Murakami suggests 'perhaps the true form of Japanese realism is no more than the flipside of a complex toward the West.' (Murakami 2000, 117)

In the painting *Zuzazazazaza* 1994, (Ill.3-19) '*zuzazazaza*' is the sound of a baseball player sliding into base, as it would be written in *manga*, the stylized squirt is a direct reference to Edo period graphic works, in 'an attempt to elevate contemporary *anime* to the status of canonical Japanese art. (Darling 2001, 68) Murakami suggests a direct line of historical descent between the flatness of the prints of the famous 19th century artist Katsushika Hokusai, and the 1970s television animation of Kanada Yoshinori. (Ill.3-20) (Murakami 2000b, 8-25) From the end of the 1970s to the beginning of the 1980s Kanada Yoshinori was the genius of special effects animation, in particular his explosions for the animated



3-19. Murakami Takashi, 1994
Zuzazazazaza
Acrlic, silkscreen on canvas mounted on board
150 x 170 cm
Collection Takahashi Ryutaro

3-20. Kanada Yoshinori, 1979
A scene from *Galaxy Express 999*
Directed by Rin Tarô
Matsumoto Reiji/Toei animation

movies *Galaxy Express 999* 1979, and *Sayonara Galaxy Express* 1988. Murakami states his 'fantastic journey in search of "super flatness" began with Yoshinori Kanada's animation.' (Murakami 2000b, 115) Particularly important in the works of Kanada is the strange style of timing structure.

> I do not think it is an overstatement to say that Yoshinori Kanada added a time axis to his 2-D on-screen compositional skill to open the doors to an entirely new paradigm in art history. Replication of the structure of 'beauty' he has constructed- this is the concept behind my splash painting creation. (Murakami 2001a, 137)

Although extremely famous in the *otaku* world, he isn't recognised in the Japanese art scene or the world of art criticism.

Other splash paintings include *Milk* 1998, and *Splash* 2000, *Aqua Blue Splash* 1998, and *Green Milk* 1998, which also conjure up the strong sexual element of 1960s Pop Art, David Hockney's *A Bigger Splash* 1967 for example, a sexual excitement at a new age of consumption, and the 'money shot' of contemporary pornography. A certain sexuality, linked as well to the *otaku* subculture by Murakami, is an important aspect of the Super Flat in its mixing of art, popular culture and subculture, and will be examined in chapter 4.In his essay 'A Theory of Super Flat Japanese Art', Murakami asserts the use of the vertical, horizontal and diagonal axes in the composition, 'the way that a picture controls the speed of its observer's gaze, the course of that gaze's scan, and the subsequent control of the information flow', connecting the Super Flat to Tsuji's concept of eccentricity. (Murakami 2000b, 8-25)

> All the eccentric artists shared a certain structural methodology, in which they created surface images that erased interstices and thus made the observer aware of the images' extreme planarity. (Murakami 2000b, 9)

Murakami cites Itô Jakuchû's *Insects, Reptiles, and Amphibians by a Pond (The Colourful Realm of Living Beings)* 18th century (Ill.3-21) as an example of this fragmented scanning gaze which occurs as the viewer's gaze zigzags over the cockerels until caught by the one facing directly toward the viewer. (Murakami 200b, 9) Murakami repeats a similar effect with his spiralling cosmos, in *Kaikaikiki in Peach Paradise* 2002 for example. (Ill.3-22) Tsuji compares Itô's composition to a computer made image, and while maintaining a certain distance from Murakami's concept, acknowledges the similarities to the Super Flat. (Yagi 2001, 46-54)

3-21. Itô Jakuchû, 18th century
Insects, Reptiles, and Amphibians by a Pond (The Colourful Realm of Living Beings)
Ink and colour on silk, no.12 of 30 hanging scrolls
142.5 x 79.4 cm
Museum of the Imperial Collection, Sannomaru Shôzôkan

3-22. Murakami Takashi, 2002
Kaikaikiki in Peach Paradise (detail)
Acrylic on canvas mounted on board
160 x 350 x 5 cm
Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, Paris

While Tsuji refers to this spirit of formal innovation as existing in Japanese art prior to and independent of its contact with Western theories of modernity, Matsui argues Murakami transformed the cynical strategy of Neo-Pop into a unique theory of Japanese art by revealing a significant ideological and aesthetic link between traditional Japanese painting and *anime*.

> Murakami has recently proposed the importance of *anime* and *manga*-derived visual expression to our day as a correlative to the reality-defying works of artists long ago. (Matsui 1999a, 24)

Murakami has developed a theory of Super Flat Japanese art, in which this legacy can be seen to be resurrected in the post World War II rise of the Japanese cartoon cultures of *manga* and *anime*. Murakami connects the stylistic affinities of *anime* and *kisô*. 'His ambition was to formulate a theory of Japanese Pop by uniting marginalized premodern and postmodern vehicles of popular imagination.' (Matsui 2001b, 52) In this way there appear to be two sides of Murakami, one is the ambiguity, simulation and kitsch, and the other is the continuity he fosters with pre-modern painters.

Connections to the pre-modern have variously been made by a number of scholarly investigations into the origins of *manga*, Susan Napier (Napier 2000, 21) and Shimizu Isao for example. (Shimizu 2001, 137-151) Tsuji also traces the origins of *manga* to a number of ancient artistic periods. (Tsuji 2001, 53-82) In the Edo period he argues artists were humourists. like *manga* artists. Soga Shôhaku, for example who humorously adapted classical Chinese themes. This is art popularised for the masses. The word *'manga'* was originally used in the Edo period to suggest 'random sketches.' (Tsuji 2001, 54) '*Manga*' was then appropriated in the Meiji period as a translation for comic strip or cartoon, and became an everyday word in the early Showa period (1926-89). John Lent traces the origins of *manga* to the Tokugawa era (1630-1868), and to a type of humorous religious cartooning called *zenga* (Zen pictures), and around the same time, *Ôtsu-e* (pictures from Ôtsu). (Lent 1989, 221-242) Another precursor of *manga* often cited, including by Tsuji, are the *Choju jinbutsu giga* (The Animals at Play scrolls) from around 1130-1150, attributed to the monk known as Toba-sôjô. (Tsuji 2001, 53-82) They depict deities as frogs, priests as monkeys, and nobles as rabbits, in scenes including farting contests, and absurd wrestling matches. In 1999 Chiba City Museum of Art's exhibition on the 'origins of *anime*' continued a connection between *manga* and *emaki* (illustrated handscrolls of the late Heian period), for example the *Shigisan engi emaki* (Miraculous tales of Mount Shigi)

from around 1150. Highlighted were similarities in techniques used to connote a sense of motion and the progression of time.

What becomes interesting, is less the various similarities between pre-modern and contemporary sensibilities, and more why these connections to the pre-modern are being made. Matsui argues that the combination of traditional and mass cultural motifs indicates Murakami's desire to

> reinstate the radical self-reflexivity of Japan's domestic pictorial culture, whose characteristics are shared by the apparently separate practises of premodern Japanese painting and postmodern comic animation. (Matsui 1999a, 21)

Sharon Kinsella argues that *manga* have been promoted as belonging to a long tradition of illustrative narratives in Japan at various times in order to give *manga* more cultural currency, protection against conservative government intervention and to counter claims that *manga* were deviant. (Kinsella 2000) There is a strong argument though that it is a way of shifting the focus from an emphasis on the influence of American culture. Azuma, for example, states 'the deepest psychosocial element beneath this tendency is the (impossible) desire to deny the post-war American cultural influence.' (Azuma 2001, n.p.)

The idea that pre-modernity and postmodernity are directly connected in Japan is an issue Azuma Hiroki's raises in 'Superflat Japanese Postmodernity', a text that was originally presented as a lecture at the MOCA gallery at the Pacific Design Center in April 2001. (Azuma 2001) Azuma addresses the claim that *manga* and *anime* are a sort of cultural successor of pre-modern Japanese tradition, and argues that Murakami's argument, when he draws a direct line from Kanô Sansetsu to Kanada Yoshinori for example, is based on the same premise. Azuma argues *manga* and *anime* culture should not be seen as a direct successor of Japanese pre-modernity, but as a result of the recent 'domestication' of post-war American culture, which was developing just at the same time with Japanese rapid economical growth and the recovery of national self-confidence in 1950s and 1960s. (Azuma 2001)

> Their preference toward the association between the 1980s postmodern society and the premodern Edo can be easily explained once you recognize the above-mentioned process of 'domestication' of the post-war American culture. In the mid-80s, many Japanese were fascinated with their economical success and tried to erase or forget their traumatic memory of the defeat in the World War 2. The reevaluation of Edo culture is socially required in such an atmosphere. (Azuma 2001, n.p.)

The erasure of this 'traumatic memory' is a key issue and will be examined in more detail in chapter 6.

Postmodern works are created by deconstructing and reconstructing the preceding works or re-reading them in a different way. In other words, Azuma argues, postmodern artists or authors prefer dismantling the preceding works into some elements or fragments and reassembling them repeatedly rather than expressing their own authorship or originality.

> In this context, you can easily see the paradoxical position of this Exhibition Superflat. Otaku culture is the result of Japanization of American pop culture. However, Murakami intends here to bring it back to its origin, that is, re-Americanize otaku culture, re-Americanize the Japanized American culture. 'Superflat' is not an authentic successor of 'pop' but its hybrid, mixed, fake bastard. (Azuma 2001, n.p.)

The subject of *otaku* and postmodernism is the subject of later books by Azuma, *Dôbutsuka suru posuto-modan* (The animalization of the postmodern), (Azuma 2001b) and *Môjô genron F kai: posutomodan, otaku, sekushuariti* (Network discussion F inspection: Postmodern, Otaku, Sexuality) (Azuma 2003), and will be examined further in chapter 4.

Nihonga

Murakami studied *Nihonga* for a Ph.D. from Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, and works such as *And then and then and then and then and then* 1996-1997 or *727* 1996 (Ill.3-23) are painted in the *Nihonga* style. Murakami describes how he began working within the *Nihonga* tradition, and for eleven years he trained and worked in this way, (Kelmachter 2002, 72-105) and claims he was a dropout from the world of *anime*, so he studied *Nihonga* to arm himself with technique, adding that most of the best students of *Nihonga* went on to become video game designers. (Yagi 2001, 46-54)

> Just as *Mr. DOB* comes from a complicated lineage that is at once celebrated as an original Japanese cultural product – namely *anime* and *manga*, and a Western import, so does the practice of *Nihonga* raise issues about cultural authenticity. *Nihonga*'s bizarre marriage of ancient painting techniques and the latest in Western approaches to form an institutionalized national style is contrived, to say the least, but perfectly suited to Murakami's concerns about colonialism and national identity. (Darling 2001, 66)

The politics of *Nihonga* are diverse and complex. While on the one hand it can be argued *Nihonga*'s 'primary goal was to restore confidence in local traditions and to counter the

3-23. Murakami Takashi, 1996
727
Acrylic on canvas mounted on board
300 x 450 cm
Collection David Tieger

3-24. Aida Makoto, 1995
Beautiful Flag (War Picture Returns)
Two-panel sliding screen, hinges, charcoal, self-made paint with medium made from Japanese glue, acrylic
169 x 169 cm
Private Collection

widespread adoption of Western modes by talented Meiji-period painters,' (Rosenfield 2001, 163) Matsui refers to art historian Kitazawa Noriaki who claimed that Fenollosa's and Okakura's invention of *Nihonga* was an Orientalist institutionalization of modern Western aesthetic standards disguised as a domestic form. It is on the contrary, Matsui argues, a conscious act of turning the colonial situation into an occasion to create a new political identity, which Murakami's contemporary practice updates. (Matsui 2001b, 53)

Acknowledging a 'crisis of traditional Japanese painting', Ernest Fenollosa, and Okakura Tenshin urged the unification of traditional Japanese painting into a new style called *Nihonga*,

> in opposition to both Yôga and the old fashioned tendency to blindly preserve traditional aspects of Japanese painting. They offered an alternative of innovating within the Japanese tradition, reviving lost techniques of ancient painting as well as incorporating the latest experiments of contemporary Western painting. (Matsui 2001b, 47)

Nihonga is not a unified school, and has evolved for over a century, divided into competitive groups, *Nihonga* artists adopt many different styles, such as *Ukiyo-e*, ink painting. Buddhist painting, working primarily on hanging scroll, screens, using traditional painting materials such as silk, water-soluble pigments, and gold and silver leaf.

Nihonga has been sustained by the 'Japanese people's nostalgia for their traditional culture.' (Rosenfield 2001, 190)

> A few painters use easels, but most paint kneeling on *tatami* mats. Most rejected oil paints, canvas, and Western print media, but some employed Western stylistic elements – Art Nouveau, for example, or French Fauvism and German Expressionism. As long as they remained within certain strict boundaries of decorum of style and subject matter, Nihonga painters were free to experiment and innovate widely. (Rosenfield 2001, 176)

Nihonga painters prefer motifs and attitudes drawn from the 10th century to the 14th centuries. It continues to win government support and public affection, the very popular 1998 exhibition at Tokyo National Museum, for example. Prevailing expressions of Japanese painting are 'still polarized by the dichotomy of an uncritical reception of foreign influences and a sentimental embracing of domestic traditions.' (Matsui 2001b, 47) John Rosenfield also makes this connection, when he writes of *Nihonga*'s 'quasi official status and its close connection with the imperial household.' (Rosenfield 2001, 172)

A basic characteristic of *Nihonga* is 'an aesthetic attitude of heightened sensitivity (even enraptured) to nature, expressing intensely personal emotions through a highly coded language of allusions to flowers, birds, animals and historical places and to the passage of the seasons.' (Rosenfield 2001, 181)

> Maybe, since the Meiji era, I think *Nihonga* and oil painting have been fundamentally different. In *Nihonga*, from the Meiji era, looking at what it tries to express, artists have been on a mission to express the Japanese spirit, the soul of Japan, Japanese beauty. However, in the so called oil painting department, or Western-style painting department, the artist wants to be richly sensitive, to be popular with women, to paint individualistic paintings, to enjoy life, then to die, just like Umehara Ryûzaburô. There still remains something of such a tradition. Hirayama Ikuo's activities also, are for society and look bureaucratic. Mr. Murakami's works are also a bit bureaucratic, by that I mean working for society. As for me, I'm not in the least like that. (Aida interview 2004)

Aida's parodies of *Nihonga* uses images of schoolgirls and

> by applying a smooth finish and aloof stylization - traditionally used in portraits of beautiful women - to scandalous subject matters, or by deliberately adopting kitsch coloring and deforming composition. (Matsui 1999, 11)

Rosenfield points out *Nihonga*'s 'reluctance to depict disturbing contemporary realities, directly or indirectly,' instead, he argues, it tended to create a 'soothing, comfortable iconography that avoided overt reference to conflict, tension, or criticism.' (Rosenfield 2001. 176)

Aida's *DOG* series from 1989 to 1998, which depict young girls with amputated arms and legs are painted in the style of *Nihonga*.

> I didn't draw this with the intent of commenting on modern Japanese society. There are a number of stories like that. The most famous one, I'm not sure whether it's really true or not, is the two Japanese girls who went travelling in India. One went missing, the other came home. After several years looking for her, they found her in a show hut, her hands and feet had been amputated, it's a terrifying story. Maybe it's a made up story, but one comes across these kinds of stories often. It was in my head at the time. (Aida interview 2004)

In my interview with Aida he states, with reference to his *DOG* series, the relation with *Nihonga*.

> For me *Nihonga* is, even today, a genre that sells at very high prices. I looked for a way to make fun of it, not in order to destroy it, but because it was so over protected. So I put that idea together with the story of the girls. My painting method was a technique from the Taishô period. Today's *Nihonga* painters do not use such methods. A strange, rougher style. The method was an anachronistic old way of drawing, I thought let's use a subject that was beyond old or new, something that

> definitely wouldn't be dealt with. It's an expression of resistance to the *Nihonga* genre, and in that work there's not that much meaning in the fact of cutting the legs off. (Aida interview 2004)

Aida suggests his use of *Nihonga* style is less an attack on *Nihonga* itself, and more a criticism of conservative art institutions. As Sawaragi states '*Nihonga* painters are authorized by the emperor system.' (Sawaragi 1992b, 75) Aida's *DOG* works are examined again in chapter 4 in relation to cuteness and the grotesque.

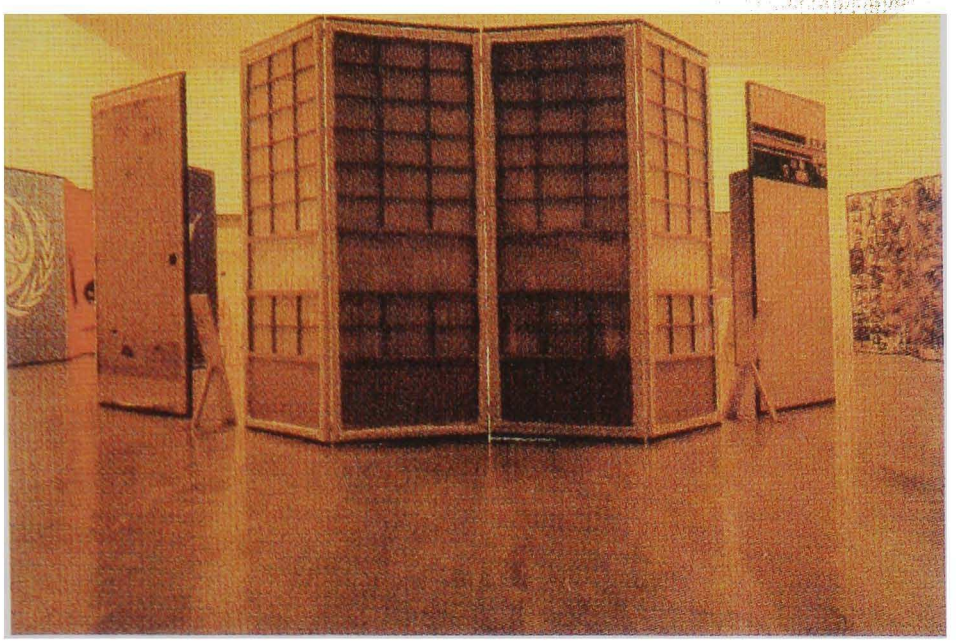
Rosenfield's study highlights how this 'sentimental embrace' could take *Nihonga* into the rhetoric of nationalism.

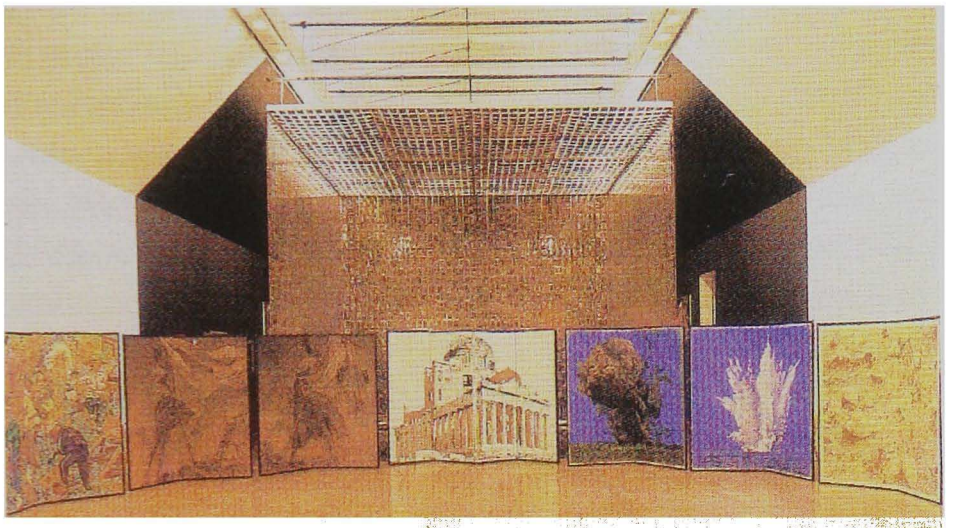
> Though he clearly believed the idyllic imagery would relieve 'the scorching drought of modern vulgarity', Okakura also envisaged the need for more muscular (i.e., military) measures to restore the cultural autonomy of Asia, and the rhetoric could turn to pure vitriol: 'Industrial conquest is awful, moral subjugation is intolerable. Our ancestral ideals, our family institutions, our ethics, our religions are daily fading away. Each succeeding generation loses moral stamina by contact with Westerners. (Rosenfield 2001, 184)

Nihonga's close link to Japanese national identity in particular has caused heated debates about its relevance and viability in an increasingly global art world. Most influential in 1920s. the relevance of this Japanese style of painting diminished after the defeat of Japan in World War II and the subsequent repudiation of those intellectuals and artists who took part in the production of war propaganda.

Painted on screens Aida's *War Painting Returns* series, including *Beautiful Flag*, (Ill.3-24) and *New York one sky*, featured in the 'Ground Zero' exhibition curated by Sawaragi Noi. (Ill.3-25) Sawaragi argues that the twisted images of sex, death and other easily transgressed subjects might be mistaken for political cartoons if the artist had an agenda other than to mock his culture. Aida isn't like Murakami, he is not super flat, there is irony still left in his works. (Sawaragi 2004, 41-57)

> Aida, however, does not merely criticise past artists for their moral lapse; instead, the almost obsessive assertion of ugliness in his own paintings indicates Aida's recognition of his inheritance of evil in the modern Japanese painting. His untitled painting of grass, on the other hand, presents Aida's homage to the early 20th century nihonga innovator Hishida Shunso, whose painting of fallen leaves celebrated the simplicity of everyday reality. This indicates Aida's hope to find a clue within the nihonga tradition to the transcendence of its historical scars. (Matsui 1999, 11)





3-25. Aida Makoto, 1999
Installation view 'Ground Zero Japan' Art Tower Mito
Photo by Inoue Yôichi

Aida's purpose is to 'unleash the violence and evil which, repressed in the official history of Japanese art, nevertheless existed as negative products of the incomplete development of 'modern' Japanese painting. (Matsui 1999, 11)

Does Aida's critique of *Nihonga* speak only as a critique of an historic style or as also embodiment of Japanese society?

> It may be a too simplistic formula, but I think it has a character similar to the Emperor system. Today, the Emperor system is not related to fascism. Smiling and waving at the people from a car type of existence. Hereafter it looks like it will survive. Therefore, I have a feeling that in the same way *Nihonga* will also continue to survive. *Nihonga* is the representative of Japan, and hereafter it will probably try to continue to be the representative. Now Japanese people don't think the Emperor is a god. Secretly they might be thinking Aiko [Princess Hironomiya's baby] also isn't cute. In the same way Japanese people won't try to kill off *Nihonga*. They would try to make *Nihonga* into a symbol of Japan. There is perhaps a kind of character of a Japanese don't you think? I think because of this contemporary art won't take root completely. These two problems are a set. Maybe, even when artists that do this kind of contemporary art would leave great works, influence culture, and leave their name in history, contemporary art would probably never become a representative of Japanese culture. Warhol has become America's representative. Why? Is it because Japan didn't have a people's revolution? Japan's democracy is perhaps different from Euro-American democracy, isn't it. However, I am not that knowledgeable in history. (Aida interview 2004)

At Mizuma Art Gallery, Aida has assembled a personal *Ken ten* (a prefectural exhibition, usually where local amateurs display their work). Written on a pedestal is the show's theme, '*Minna to issho*' (Everyone Together/Same as Everyone). Seventeen hastily drawn, image and text paintings on standard size sheets of colored paper hang on fake green bulletin boards made of paper and wood trim. Aida's stated four rules are to act quickly; from thought to action, not to look at the materials, finish quickly, and work without making a rough draft. (Aida 2004, 74-76) Crude sexual puns posing as advertisements, and bad 'manner posters', Aida's '*minna to issho*' is about the pseudo sham democratic society of Japan in the post-war period, the works represent its mediocrity. (Aida 2004, 74-76) Starting with banality as his base, Aida combines traditional art with depravity and degradation.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to locate contemporary artists Murakami Takashi, Nara Yoshitomo,

and Aida Makoto within the frame of art history. The works of these artists, all of who took part in the seminal exhibition 'Tokyo Pop', represent a reconfiguration of 1960s Pop Art. Cuteness in these artists' works is associated with an affinity with commodity design, kitsch, and the appropriation of popular culture for their own ends. Murakami launches from 'Ground Zero' in an attempt to reclaim territory for a new art at the border between art and non-art, just as Pop Art played off the traditional high and low, laying claim to be the art of the banal, the new postmodern sublime, and encapsulated in Murakami's concept of the Super Flat.

Murakami in particular makes use of Pop Art's strategy of playing off two opposites in a process of deconstruction. Murakami appears as both traditionalist, citing traditional Japanese values and incorporating pre-modern Japanese aesthetics identified by Tsuji, and *enfant terrible* of contemporary art. The exhibition 'Tokyo Pop' at once suggests a time lag with America, while also claiming the West might follow Japan. Derrida, while insisting deconstruction cannot be defined, differentiates deconstruction from critique and analysis.

> It is because deconstruction interferes with solid structures, 'material' institutions, and not only with discourses or signifying representations, that it is always distinct from analysis or a 'critique'. (Derrida 1987, 19)

These artists urge the viewer to see the world from a new and startling perspective, an 'ironic reflection'. (Matsui 1996b, 123) They deconstruct conventional narratives and present their own stories, Matsui argues, which darkly reflect on the destructiveness inherent in contemporary civilization. (Matsui 1996b, 126)

Formulations of the postmodern often agree in detecting a crisis of representation. In this contemporary postmodern moment, the virulence of capital has turned everything into pure commodified signs. Murakami, has however, by exaggerating consumerism and taking Pop Art to new limits, with the Louis Vuitton project for example, tested the possibility of maintaining a critical position within contemporary art however small it might appear.

Chapter 4 Displacement: cuteness and the erotic

The focus of this chapter is to examine how contemporary Japanese artists have exposed the presence of cuteness as an important aesthetic in the adult world of *ero* (erotic) *manga* and *anime*. According to Sawaragi Noi, '*Ero*' is a key word that captures the essence of 'Tokyo Pop'. (Sawaragi 1999a, 70-78) The 1998 exhibitions 'Ero Pop Tokyo' in Los Angeles, and 'Ero Pop Christmas' in Tokyo, (Ill.4-1) curated by Murakami Takashi, included works by the erotic figurine maker Bome and *ero manga* artist Machino Henmaru. These group exhibitions represent a look into the subcultural world of Japanese *otaku*: *ero manga*, *rorikon* (Lolita complex), computer games, *anime*, comic festivals, and *manga* figures. Often translated as 'nerd', *otaku* usually refers to someone with an obsessive interest in *manga* and *anime* in Japan. '*Poku*', a combination of the words 'Pop', and '*otaku*', is the concept that Murakami developed alongside the 'Ero Pop' exhibitions. Through investigation of key works, particularly those by Murakami Takashi and Aida Makoto, and interviews with the artists, the aim of this chapter is to reach a new understanding of fine art's engagement with cuteness and the erotic.

Murakami Takashi's figure projects *Hiropon* 1997, (Ill.4-2) *My Lonesome Cowboy* 1998, (Ill.4-3) and *Miss Ko*^{2} 1996 are key works, and represent an exploration into the process of *manga* characters being made into three dimensional versions as small figures.

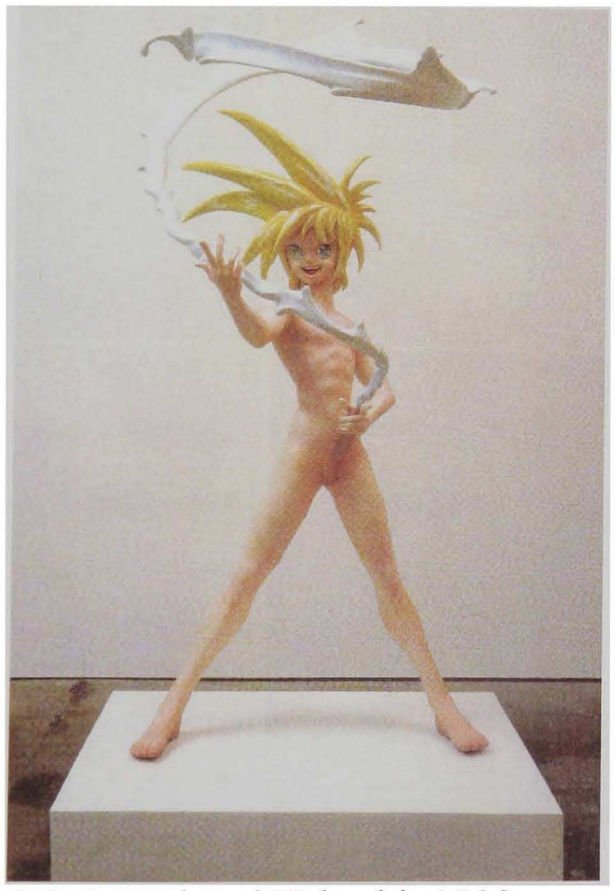
> *Miss Ko*^{2} was my introductory course in the *otaku* industry, *Hiropon* my artistic critique of *otaku*, and *MLC* (*My Lonesome Cowboy*) my attempt at a 3-D rendering of an *anime*. All these characters were thickly wrapped in what I see as particularly Japanese psycho-sexual complexes. (Murakami 2001, 142)

Model figures, with intricate detail, and sold, often very cheaply, in *manga* shops, convenience stores and vending machines, are very popular, particularly with *otaku*. While the magazine *Model Graphix* published 'a thorough analysis of the project in an effort to inquire into the *otaku* mistrust of "art", and better understand what it was we were doing', Murakami argues the art world has largely overlooked these figure projects. (Murakami 2001, 89) Through key texts, including those from non-art historical sources, such as *manga* and *anime* studies, the aim of this chapter is to conduct an analysis of these works, and formulate a new interpretation of cuteness in this area of Japanese popular culture.

In Murakami's *My Lonesome Cowboy* it is possible to make a connection with *shunga*, the

4-1. Yamaguchi Ai, 1998
'Ero Pop Christmas' exhibition flier

4-2. Murakami Takashi, 1997
Hiropon
Oil paint, acrylic, fibreglass and iron
254 x 116.8 x 91 cm
Collection the artist



4-3. Murakami Takashi, 1998
My Lonesome Cowboy
Oil paint, acrylic, fibreglass and iron
254 x 116.8 x 91 cm
Collection the artist

erotic woodblock prints of the Edo period, where often men were depicted with huge penises. 'At the root of the figure characters was their clear functionality as pornographic statues.' (Murakami 2001a, 138) The relation of *ero manga* and *anime* with *shunga* is an important area of investigation in this chapter.

The subject of *otaku* is now thought to be one of the most important factors in any analysis of Japanese contemporary culture, not only because of the many artworks and products of popular culture that originated from *otaku* culture which are becoming internationally accepted, but also because their mentalities are beginning to have a great influence on Japanese society. (Azuma 2001, n.p.) Ôtsuka Eiji identified *otaku* as 'the keyword of post-modern society.' (Kinsella 2000, 129) Murakami states that the public ignorance of *otaku* was the primary reason behind his desire to represent *otaku* culture. (Murakami quoted in Wakasa 2001, n.p.) Azuma notes the fact that *otaku* culture and its products have generally suffered an unjustified disregard by many intellectuals and critics. (Azuma 2001, n.p.) Who *otaku* are, and what kind of subculture they represent, will be examined in this chapter.

This chapter considers *otaku* as a subculture, and examines how cuteness has been used as a deviant pattern of consumption. Reading *otaku* as a subculture offers an alternate interpretation of cuteness and *ero manga*, involving a subversive transformation of cuteness and a resistance to the hegemony of consumption; how cuteness is appropriated, displaced, and made to carry 'secret' meanings, which 'express, in code, a form of resistance to the order which guarantees their continued subordination.' (Hebdige 1979, 18)

Hebdige's reference to Claude Levi Strauss's concept of *bricolage* resonates with the notion of the displacement of cuteness in *otaku* culture, where the careful ordering, classifying and arranging into structures of the *bricoleur*, relocates an object in a different position within a discourse creating a new discourse. In the same way *rorikon manga* represent a kind of collage, cuteness being juxtaposed with explicit sex and violence.

> The challenge to hegemony which subcultures represent is not issued directly by them. Rather it is expressed obliquely, in style. The objections are lodged, the contradictions displayed at the profoundly superficial level of appearances; that is at the level of signs. (Hebdige 1979, 17)

In this way cuteness is subverted, and offends the silent majority. It represents cuteness stolen from the everyday world and made to carry secret meanings, meanings that express in code a form of resistance, signalling the breakdown of consensus in the post-war period.

Aida Makoto's works allude to a cuteness mixed in with the erotic, which is particularly apparent in *rorikon manga*, and corresponds to a complex fixation with *shôjo*. The *manga Angel* by U-Jin, for example, has a cute style which conflicts with the pornographic and sometimes violent content. (Ill.4-4) *Ero manga* are freely available in Japan, and have high circulation, and support from major publishers to convenience stores. *Imekura* (image clubs), which feature hostesses in various costumes, often have girls wearing school uniforms, (Ills.4-5, 4-6) while school uniforms are also for sale in *manga* stores and even the popular low cost department store *Don Quixote*. Schoolgirl knickers are available in *buru-sera* shops, ('*buru*' is anglicized Japanese for 'bloomers' and refers to schoolgirls' navy gym knickers, and *sera* for 'sailor' refers to the sailor suit school uniform), and have even also appeared in vending machines. The practise of *enjo kôsai* (compensated dating) previously discussed in chapter 2, is another example of this schoolgirl cuteness being a popular and desirable characteristic.

Cuteness is a popular aesthetic in the world of the Japanese adult sex industry, which is often referred to as the 'pink' industry, where *pinsaro* (pink salons) are oral sex bars, and pink curtains mark the entrance to the 'adults only' section of DVD and video rental shops. Animal motifs are also popular, and adult clubs and bars often feature women dressed as rabbits or cats, wearing tails and big ears. (Ill.4-7) A cover illustration for the *manga Inu Ningyo* (Dog Doll) 1994, by Machino Henmaru, highlights this popularity of teddy bears and other cute animals in Japanese *ero manga*. (Ill.4-8) An illustration of a promotional flier by *Milky Purin* for the adult DVD *Loveless* features a cute marketing character similar to the ones of Sanrio. (Ill.4-9)

In order to examine the power relations involved in *rorikon manga* and *anime*, this chapter refers to key texts in the fields of theories of the male gaze and voyeurism, the feminist critique of pornography, and studies of *manga* and Japanese pornography, such as those by Setsu Shigematsu, (Setsu 1999) Funabashi Kanako, (Funabashi 1995) Sandra Buckley, (Buckley 1991) and Susan Napier, (Napier 2000) and questions whether the little girl

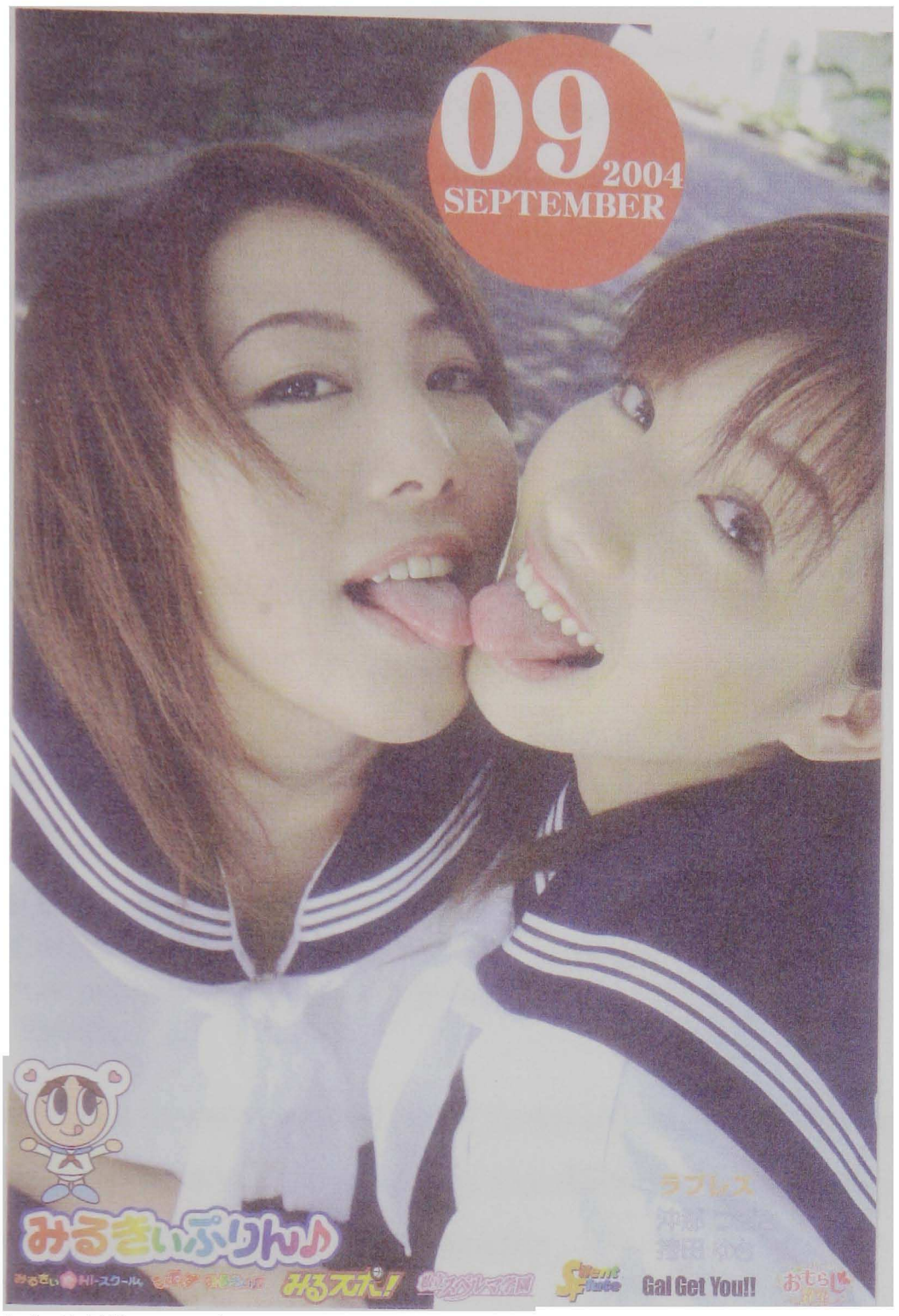
4-4. U-Jin, 1989
Angel manga cover no.1
Young Sunday Comics
Tokyo: Shôgakukan

4-5. *Verry*, 2003
Shinjuku *imekura* (image club) promotional flier

4-6. *Imekura* (image club) sign in Shinjuku, 2003
Photo the author

4-7. Tsukada Kazunori, 2004
Nonamin Woderland
Young Jump June p3
Tokyo: Issuisha

4-8. Machino Henmaru, 1994
Inu ningyô (dog doll)
Manga cover
Izumi Comics
Tokyo: Issuisya



4-9. Milky Purin, 2004
Loveless DVD promotional flier

heroines of *rorikon manga* simultaneously reflect an awareness of the increasing power and centrality of young women in society, as well as a reactive desire to see these young women infantilised. Baudrillard's theory of seduction also corresponds to this use of cuteness.

> To seduce is to appear weak. To seduce is to render weak. We seduce with our weakness, never with strong signs or powers. In seduction we enact this weakness, and this is what gives seduction its strength. (Baudrillard 1990, 83)

Anne Allison examines *ero manga* as a form of popular culture targeted at males, but criticizes the generalising position that pornography serves to reproduce male dominance over women. Instead she argues it is necessary to look at how pornography may work for someone it gives pleasure to rather than against someone it ideologically oppresses.

Allison points out that while Western theory is still a useful tool, we must be aware of gaps which appear when it is applied to a different cultural setting.

> Much of 'male gaze' theory carries western assumptions about the construction of sexuality, subjectivity, and family dynamics whether these assumptions are stated explicitly or not (and they are usually not).
> (Allison 2000b, 33)

Allison's evocation of a meaning beyond literal interpretation, suggests the possibility of discovering through the works of artists such as Murakami and Aida, a new discourse surrounding cuteness in pornographic representation.

Pop + Otaku = POKU

Murakami sites Anno Hideaki's film *Love and Pop* 1996 as one of *Poku*'s representative works, (Murakami 1999a, 57-59) (Ill.4-10) a film which also featured in the Super Flat exhibition. Murakami questions why the film was largely ignored, and argues this was due to it being too revolutionary, and because it was 'dismissed as an *otaku* film by an animation director.' (Murakami 2000, 123) Anno had previously worked on animation films such as Miyazaki's *Kaze no tani no Nausicâ* (Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind) 1981, the story of a young girl's fight to save her village, and famously controversial for the up skirt shots which showed the fourteen-year-old Nausicaa was not wearing any underwear. Anno later directed *Shin Seiki Evangerion* (Neon Genesis Evangelion) in 1995, and has also made animation sequences for Nintendo.

4-10. Anno Hideaki, 1998
Love and Pop DVD back cover
King Record Co., Japan

4-11. Anno Hideaki, 1998
Love and Pop
Scene from the film
From Murakami 2000, 110-111

Love and Pop was filmed on consumer-grade handheld video cameras, and has the feel of an amateur documentary. It focuses on the daily lives of a group of girls in modern Tokyo, and is based on the novel *Love and Pop* by Murakami Ryû, who also wrote '*Yumemiru koro wo sugireba: Murakami Ryû versus joshi kôsei 51 nin* (Beyond Dreams: Murakami Ryû versus 51 High-school Girls) in 1998. In the film, as the lead schoolgirl Hiromi begins to immerse herself in *enjo kôsai* to get the money she needs to buy a ring she wants, the clock counts down to 9:00pm when the department store closes, and Hiromi meets a number of clients that each give her a disturbing look into the world of schoolgirl prostitution. In one scene of the film a *sararîman* asks the schoolgirls to each gently chew a grape, and then places the grapes in test-tubes in order to later collect DNA samples. While highlighting the fact that intercourse is not always the main objective of *enjo kôsai*, this DNA fetish also represents a kind of extreme close up, which will later be discussed in relation to Baudrillard's concepts of pornography and a certain type of Japanese strip club.

At the end of the film Hiromi is robbed before she can buy the ring, and after all her trauma, finds herself left with nothing, and the film closes with Hiromi and her friends walking along a sewer in Shibuya, a scene which, according to Murakami, 'shows an otaku's appreciation of beauty.' (Murakami 1999a) (Ill.4-11) The ending music was the song *That Marvellous Love Again* by Kitayama Osamu and Katô Kazuhiko.
With this song from the high-growth date of Japan, when everyone believed in the country's bright future, in the background, the image of a high school girl – Tokyo's sacred being – sloshing along the dirty river exudes a powerful irony. (Murakami 2000, 123) Who are *otaku*, how did this subculture arise and what is this new sense beauty they have developed?

Otaku are now widely regarded as anti-social, perverted and selfish, preferring computers, *manga* and *anime* to real communication or social activities. *Otaku* themselves have a strong collective hostility towards those who do not share their interests. Popular activities include going to specialist shops such as in Akihabara, and participating in '*Comike*' (short for 'Comic Market'), the comic fair launched in 1975 which is held biannually in Tokyo, and attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors. *Otaku* have become alienated from society; their introversive and defensive tendency can be understood as a kind of inevitable reaction against social pressures.

4-12. *Animage*, August 1980
Magazine cover vol.3 no.8

In 1974 the TV *anime Uchûsenkan Yamato* (Spaceship Yamato) changed the face of Japanese animation. Movies and magazines followed, and in particular the magazine *Animage*, (Ill.4-12) which analysed, discussed and examined *anime* from every possible angle, sparked the late-teen *anime* culture and paved the way for *otaku*. The word '*otaku*' was first used by Kawamori Masaharu and Mikimoto Haruhiko, the heads of Studio Nue which was responsible for much of *Spaceship Yamato*. Fans picked up on their usage, and used it instead of the usual *anata* (you) to show respect. Later the subculture critic Nakamori Akio used it derogatorily to refer to *anime* and science fiction fans, who started to use it to refer to themselves, half derogatorily, half proudly. The literal meaning of *otaku* is 'your home' and by association, 'you', 'yours' and 'home'. It is a witty reference both to someone who is not accustomed to close friendships, and therefore tries to communicate with his peers using this distant and over-formal form of address, and to someone who spends most of their time on their own at home.

Murakami's work *The hellish madness of the game has come to an end leaving you hanging* 1994, which consists of a *Mr. DOB* balloon, which looks into a mirror as it descends from the ceiling, 'embodies the self-reflexivity determining a geek's forever deferred attempt to reach the other (meaning) outside himself.' (Matsui 1996, 69) It is inspired by *Puyopuyo*, a computer game released in 1991 that involves a frantic destruction of falling cloud-shaped entities. In the game, as you burst the army of clouds within the designated time, you collect rewards, such as a princess, or a castle, which might suggest some kind of narrative, but the game finishes with the message: 'And then, this story ends without meaning'.

> This revelation of nothingness captures the essence of a geek's erotic pursuit: supplementation of the ultimate object of desire with local exploits and constant arousal without reaching a climax. (Matsui 1996, 69)

The hellish madness of the game has come to an end leaving you hanging 'eloquently embodies Murakami's awareness of the drive of expenditure and the schizophrenic love of details that define a geek's world'. (Matsui 1996, 69)

Parody is a key feature within the world of *otaku*, particularly in their own *dôjinshi*. *Dôjinshi*, the term is derived from *dôjin*, a literary group, and *shi*, meaning magazine, are *manga* and magazines, drawn by amateur rather than professional *manga* artists. Avid fans of *dôjinshi* art attend semiannual *dôjinshi* conventions, where old and new *dôjinshi* are

bought and sold, the largest of which is *Comike*. Various categories of *dôjinshi* include *seinen dôjinshi*, which usually contain adult material, *yaoi* and *shonen-ai dôjinshi*, which feature graphic depictions of male homosexuality and usually target adult women, and *ippan dôjinshi* which do not contain adult material. *Dôjinshi* are usually parodies of currently popular *manga* or *anime* series but can include older titles or even original characters, stories usually consisting of a parody of an original story using the characters from the particular *manga* in question.

Some of the sources for *dôjinshi* are difficult and obscure; one of the key features in the subculture of *otaku* is hierarchy based on trivia knowledge of these obscure sources, and the fetishisation of details, which resonates with the 'elitism' that Hutcheon argues is involved in parody. (Hutcheon 2000, 27),

> Parody posits, as a prerequisite to its very existence, a certain aesthetic institutionalization which entails the acknowledgement of recognizable, stable forms and conventions. (Hutcheon 2000, 75)

The paradox of unofficial subversion seen in *dôjinshi*, is also highlighted by Hutcheon as characteristic of all parodic discourse.

In Hutcheon's *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth Century Art Forms*, she highlights a 'critical distance' in parody.

> The tension between the potentially conservative effect of repetition and the potentially revolutionary impact of 'difference' is common in all parody. (Hutcheon 2000, xii)

The critical distance implied between the background text being parodied and the new incorporating work is usually signalled by irony. (Hutcheon 2000, 32) Hutcheon highlights irony as 'the major rhetorical strategy' deployed by parody (Hutcheon 2000, 25), and this resonates with the works of Aida Makoto, where 'irony' is also highlighted as one of the 'key words' to grasp his work. (Murobushi and Aida 2004, 53) Aida refers to the influence of Marcel Duchamp, and Mishima Yukio, who he felt was an expert in irony, using it to attack the avant-garde, and states that *hara kiri* suicide is the ultimate irony. Nara Yoshitomo also references 'Ironic Fantasy – Another World by Five Contemporary Artists' in 1996 as a key exhibition. (Nara in Murakami and Nara 2001, 137)

Matsui highlights the importance of this element in Murakami's work, which she argues

> challenges the essentialism inherent in the frequent denunciation of post-modern 'pastiche' as an inferior modernism unable to project critical consciousness beyond simulation of other styles. (Matsui 1996, 69)

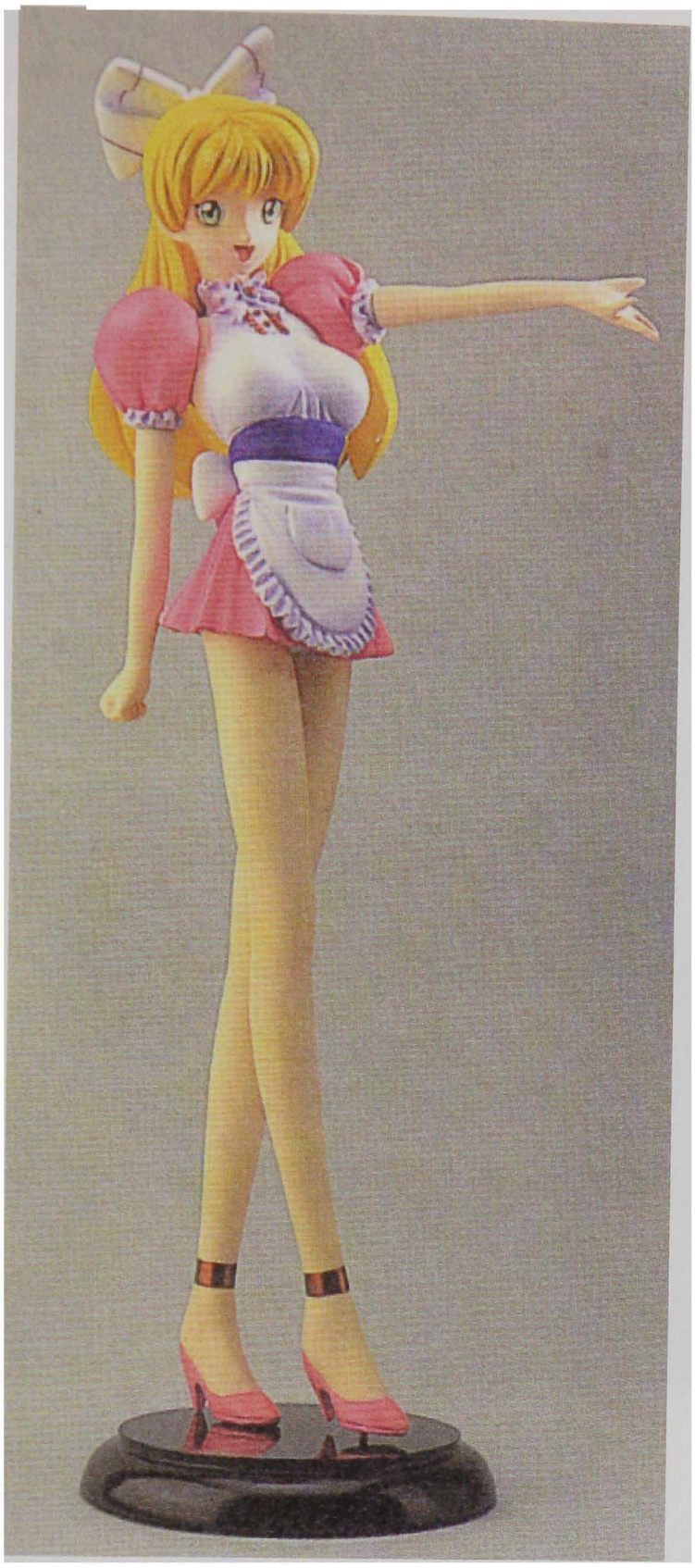
Parody and pastiche are often both included in the discourse surrounding postmodernism, distinguished perhaps by what Linda Hutcheon argues is the ironic 'trans-contextualization' of parody. (Hutcheon 2000, 12) The importance of parody, is not only a key element of *otaku manga*, but also for contemporary artists such as Murakami and Aida. That the 'target' of parody is not always the parodied text at all, 'especially in twentieth-century art forms,' underlines the need for further analysis of these artists' works. (Hutcheon 2000, 50)

Murakami's figure work *Miss Ko*^{2} 1996 was made in collaboration with the model company Kaiyôdô, and represents Murakami's first collaboration with *otaku*. Kaiyôdô, one of the largest figurine manufacturers in Japan, making a huge number of models, including *Ultra-man* and *Godzilla*, were even commissioned to make models for the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Murakami worked with '*otaku* king' Okada Toshio, Executive Director Miyawaki Shûichi, famous *anime* figure maker Bome, and Asano Masahiko. Asano highlights the importance of his knowledge of *otaku* for Murakami's project.

> My role as author of this project boiled down to one activity: injecting an *otaku* context. I refined and condensed roughly 20 years of expressions of *otaku* sexuality and sexual complexes, and used them to dope the project with intensely ill intentioned parody. (Asano quoted in Murakami 2001, 95)

The first figure produced was a 1/6-scale figure, *Project Miss Ko*^{2} , modeled by Bome. (Ill.4-13)

The name *Project Miss Ko*^{2}, recalls the *anime Project A-Ko 2*, the sequel to *Project A-Ko* by Moriyama Yûji. (Ill.4-14) Originally released in 1983, the fast-paced, cheerfully inane *Project A-Ko* spawned numerous sequels and won a devoted fan base. *Project A-Ko* 'parodies the magical girls genre and the lesbian elements of lolikon.' (Clements 1998, 44) The story, which focuses on the efforts of rich, mecha-building B-Ko to win the affections of the infantile C-Ko from A-Ko, who possesses super-powers, is a reference *Project A*, the title of a popular movie by Hong Kong actor Jackie Chan, in which he introduces four



4-13. Murakami Takashi, 1999
Project Miss Ko^2 (perfect edition)
Original model by Bome, Kaiyôdô
53.2 x 14.5 x 21.5 cm

4-14. Nishijima Katsuhiko, 1986
Project A-Ko 2
DVD cover
Sôeishinsha

characters as Mr. A, Mr. B, Mr. C and Mr. D. The sequel *Project A 2* made in 1987, is based on a real project that was undertaken by the Hong Kong coastguards in their fight against piracy, and includes some famous stunt scenes, a fall from a clock tower for example, that were tributes to Harold Lloyd and Buster Keaton. This direct use of humorous parody *anime* as the references for his art suggests a deliberate strategy by Murakami.

Project A-Ko is also linked to *Cream Lemon*, a series of *anime* films produced by Sôeishinsha which were first released in 1984, and mark the beginning of erotic *anime*, and an important influence on the adult *bishôjo* computer games genre (Clements 1988, 44) *Cream Lemon* films were very popular, running until 1987, the year when the famous hardcore *anime Legend of the Overfiend* was released, and *anime* became much more explicit.

The final life-size version *Miss Ko*^{2} was made by another model manufacturer, with Bome and Murakami supervising. However, the result, Murakami felt, was too small, and therefore lacked '*otaku-ness*'. (Murakami 2001, 140) It had become a mannequin, not a life-sized figure. 'A mannequin contrasts with the figurine, which is the object of love, and an outlet for sexual desire.' (Asano quoted in Murakami 2001, 95) It was remade using a different manufacturer and *Miss Ko*^{2} *Mark II* was made, although at 'Wonder Festival' (the figurine festival held in Tokyo) *Mark I* was better received by *otaku*, and later appeared in the 1996 exhibition at New York's Marianne Boesky Gallery.

The market for figures, so popular with *otaku*, started with model enthusiasts making self-assembly figurine kits for each other, usually in very limited editions. Military models, such as tanks and planes were popular. Initially it was like a cottage industry with workshops at home, but around the mid 1980s, mail order companies, advertising in model magazines, expanded the market. In 1992 figure materials changed from resin to vinyl, which allowed for much more detail, and figures became popular with the general public. (Sanada 2001, 24-27) *Otaku*'s favorite *anime* and game characters, such as *bishôjo* (beautiful young girls) and robots, became the major sellers. (Morikawa 2003, 56) Along with Kaiyôdô, Kamiya and Hasegawa are other major companies making high quality figures. In 1995/6 *Neon Genesis Evangelion* started a figure craze, and the garage kit

4-15. Murakami Takashi, 2004
Eri Ko[2]
GQ Japan no.14 July 2004, p193

4-16. Satô Eriko, 2004
Photo by Shiratori Shintarô
GQ Japan no.14 July 2004, p193

industry expanded again. Girls from animated movies like *Sailor Moon* were now made in editions of thousands, instead of the usual hundreds. (Morikawa 2003, 44)

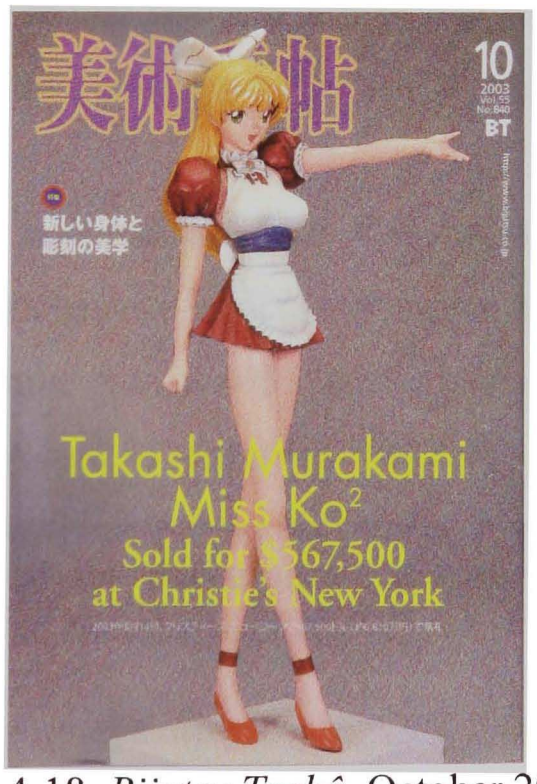
Miss Ko^2 is based on a character from the fighting *bishôjo* game *Viable Geo*, and wears a waitress uniform from the restaurant chain *Anna Millers*. *Viable Geo* was not a particularly original or spectacular game, but typical, and created with a complete understanding of the tastes of *otaku* market, including their fetishism for uniforms. (Murakami 2001, 139) In 2004 Satô Eriko posed as *Miss Ko*^{2} in collaboration with Murakami at Koyama Gallery. (Ill.4-15) Later, in an edition of *GQ* magazine she poses in other costumes, including in school uniform (Ill.4-16) again highlighting the importance of uniforms.

> The significance of uniforms in Japanese popular culture is a subject that has been well researched. In Sharon Kinsella's essay 'What's behind the fetishism of Japanese School Uniforms?' she argues that uniforms represent a site of power relations. The cult of the military-style uniform is about the nature of the relationship between the individual in uniform and external forces of power. (Kinsella 2002, 216)

The late 1960s and 1970s counter-culture had previously produced 'extreme images of schoolgirls being seduced or raped by monsters, schoolmasters or elderly relatives', (Kinsella 2002, 221) while in the 1980s the little girl in school uniform also became 'the central object of desire of Lolita complex pornography and Science Fiction.' (Kinsella 2002, 224) Kinsella also goes on to talk of the 'high-school girl boom' of the 1990s, when these images entered the mainstream, and this will be discussed further later in this chapter.

The importance of uniforms or costumes is highlighted by the practice of *kosupure*, an *otaku* activity where fans dress up as their favourite *manga* and *anime* characters, and engage in role-playing games, or just meet in groups in places such as Tokyo's Yoyogi Park. (Ill.4-17) This illustration shows a girl dressed in a 'Gothic Lolita style' in Yoyogi, with the NHK building (which resembles New York's Empire State Building) in the background. For Jennifer Cahill 'cosplay' represents a quest for *kawaii*, an 'escape from uncertain times', but also 'an act of rebellion in a culture that prizes harmony.' (Cahill 2003, 4) She also points to 'alter egos and secret identities.' (Cahill 2003, 5) This relates to the concept of 'character change' discussed in chapter 2, and will be discussed further with relation to the schizophrenic characteristic of *otaku* culture in chapter 5.

4-17. *Kosupure* (costume play) girl near Yoyogi, Tokyo, 2004
Photo the author



4-18. *Bijutsu Techô*, October 2003
Journal cover vol.55 no.840

The October 2003 edition of *Bijutsu Techô* showed on its front cover a picture of *Miss Ko*[2] with the headline 'Sold for $567,500 at Christies New York.' (Ill.4-18) The edition came with a miniature *Miss Ko*[2] figure. The daily newspaper *Asahi Shinbun* had earlier covered the 2002 sale of Murakami's *Miss Hiropon* for $380,000 at the contemporary art auction at New York's Christies, and asked if Japanese art had reached the same level as Western art. (Ônishi 2002, 25) Coverage from both newspapers and serious art journals increased, reflecting a changing attitude towards Murakami, as success in the US brought wider acceptance in Japan, and recalls Murakami's earlier claims that success in Japan would come after success in America. (Murakami 2001, 131) The fact that he was being successful in America was in itself an issue.

The design of *Hiropon* took its original inspiration from a large-breasted girl game that was on a software fan magazine Murakami picked up at the 1992 summer *manga* festival '*Comike*'.

> With these abnormal swollen nipples and breasts, I could illustrate the depth of Japan's subculture, and the excesses of its art, the psychosexual complexes of the Japanese, and the increasingly malformed *otaku* culture! It was a paradoxical expression of flat three dimensionality unique in the history of art. (Murakami 2001, 141)

Murakami made the life-sized model *Hiropon* without Bome, who refused to make it. This was a piece too mocking of *otaku*, and raises the issue of *otaku*'s reaction to Murakami.

As a contemporary artist with international fame, Murakami is regarded as outside the *otaku* community, and has been heavily criticized by some writers and artists. Hosono Fujihiko, a famous and influential *manga* artist, for example, has criticized Murakami's project for exploiting *otaku*. (Asano in Murakami 2001, 95)

> For *otaku* creators to participate in an art project, it requires them to sell their *otakudom* in the name of Art. That kind of immoral selling-out is an anathema to *otaku*.' (Asano quoted in Murakami 2001, 95)

Murasame Kenji's essay *Unconscious 'Stereotypes', Performed 'Stereotypes'*, in the May 1998 edition of *Model Graphix*, is a key text dealing with the model world's doubts concerning Murakami's plan to transform figure characters into art. Murakami is looked on as something of a heretic by the *otaku* community, and has met with a cool reception many times. Azuma Hiroki also highlights the conflict between Murakami and *otaku* in his article 'Superflat Japanese Postmodernity.' (Azuma 2001, n.p.)

The *otaku* community did not appreciate this attention of contemporary art and the public exposure of their private world this entailed. The *otaku* who collaborated with Murakami have also been criticised. Murakami's works do have various *otaku* characteristics, but Azuma argues, he lacks the ability to grasp intuitively the *otaku* essence. Murakami's fascination is with the surface of *otaku* culture, and merely *otaku*-like design. (Azuma 2001, n.p.) In Azuma's opinion Murakami's experiment doesn't have a complete understanding of the structure of *otaku* culture.

Murakami himself maintains a distance between himself and this *otaku* world.

> There is a difference between an artist whose creativity stems from otaku-like ideas and a genuine otaku. I am not otaku. Otakus are pure dilettantes. They never create anything, but they know the minutest detail about strange animation films, comics, and game softs [computer games]. And they can only critique them with the language of anime or comics. But I still thought that it was great that they had a system of criticism made up entirely from the language of their media. So I wanted to participate in their events, listen to them talk, and pick up on what looked really strange to me, the things that seemed to reveal the deepest mystery of the otaku mind. (Murakami quoted in Matsui 1998, n.p.)

Murakami later states that *Poku* was a marketing concept used to get interest in his work and the 1998 'Ero Pop' exhibitions in LA and Tokyo, and has since moved to distance himself from *Poku* and *ero* pop generally. (Murakami 2002, 4)

> I coined the term *poku* in an attempt to blend the oil and water, but it didn't work, and when I later coined the term *Superflat*, the term *poku* disappeared completely. The term Superflat evokes more compression of art and otaku than a fusion of these two elements.' (Murakami 2002, 4)

Azuma later admits that in the Super Flat exhibition Murakami succeeded in acquiring genuine cooperation from *otaku*. (Azuma 2001, n.p.)

Designed as a pair with *Miss Hiropon*, Murakami's goal with *My Lonesome Cowboy* 1998 was to trace the processes in the *anime* industry of creating a three dimensional figure from a two dimensional character. (Murakami 2001, 88-89) Figure culture began with the desire to bring *manga* and *anime* characters into the real world. According to Miyawaki Shûichi, Managing Director of Kaiyôdô, the most difficult figures to make are characters from animated movies.

> The film characters are two-dimensional. We have to re-create them in three dimensions, and make them look they stepped out of the two-dimensional movie.

> Creators show their skill by making figurines realistic and lifelike. (Sanada 2001, 25)

Converting a two-dimensional *anime* character into a three-dimensional figure is a classic *otaku* desire.

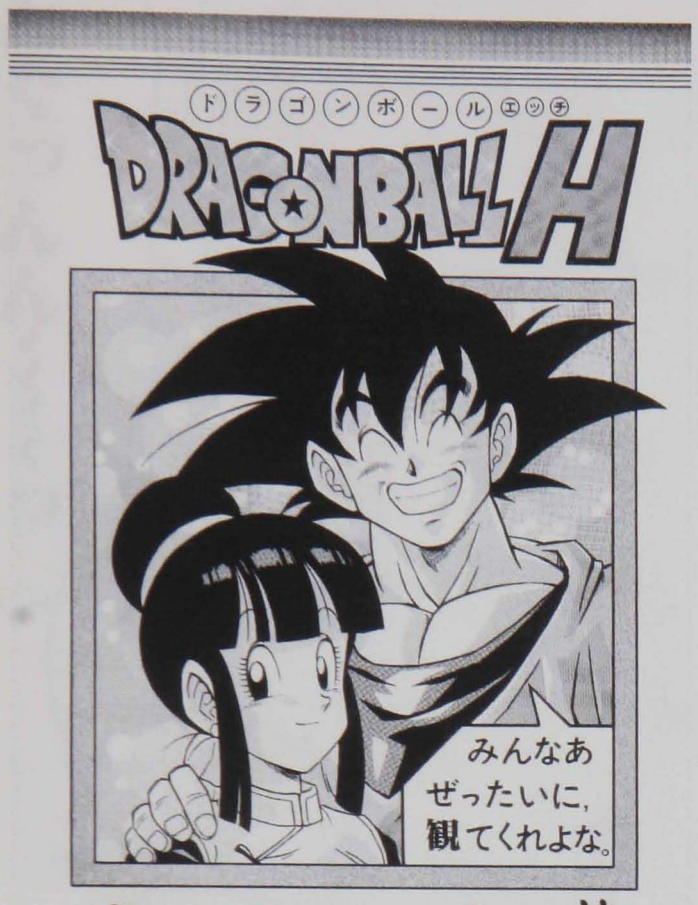
The idea for 'cowboy' comes from a novel by Kataoka Yoshio about a truck driver travelling in the United States. (Murakami 2001, 142) The spiky hairstyle is a direct reference to *Dragon Ball*, the *manga* by Toriyama Akira serialized in *Weekly Shônen Jump* from 1984 to 1995, and TV *anime* series from 1986 on *Fuji TV*. The *anime* face with a very realistic body is modelled after a character from the Sega game *Final Fantasy 7*, which imitates *Dragon Ball*. (Murakami 2001, 142) Shinada Fuyuki, the figure's fabricator refers to the pose of *My Lonesome Cowboy* as an overt phallic pose distinctive to contemporary Japan. Computer game characters such as *Amuro* in *Operation Gundam* by game designer Yoshikazu Yasuhiko, as well as *anime*, are responsible for this style of pose.

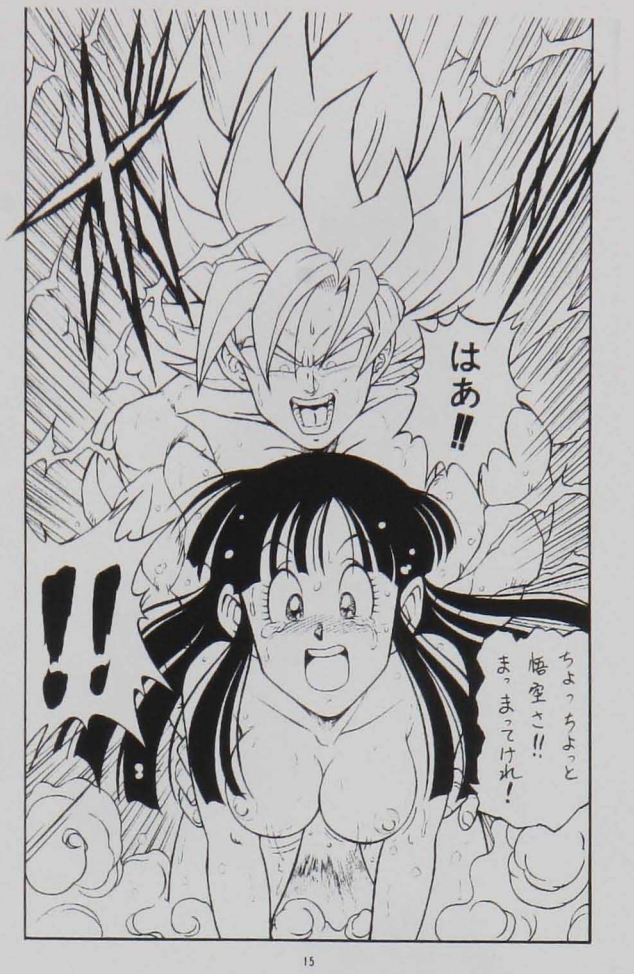
The *dôjinshi Dragonball H* 1994 represents an *otaku* take on the manga *Dragonball Z* and provides an interesting comparison with Murakami's work. (Ill.4-19) This work again alludes to the importance of parody in *otaku* representation, especially in *dôjinshi*. *Dragonball H* is a reworking of *Dragonball Z*, similar to Murakami's, in which the letter H is a pun on the letter Z of the original and a reference to *eitchi* which can also mean *hentai*, or sexually perverse.

Life-sized models highlight the figures' already distorted bodies to the point of grotesqueness. Yet this bizarre quality is what contributes to the work's impact. By exaggerating *Hiropon's* freakishness, Murakami deconstructs the fantasy.

> To enlarge the usually one-foot-high is to highlight their already distorted bodies to the point of grotesqueness. Yet this bizarre quality is what contributes to the work's impact. By exaggerating *Hiropon's* freakishness, Murakami exposes the monstrosity of the fantasy. (Cruz 1999, 18)

Murakami's embrace of *otaku* obsessions highlights the grotesqueness which is a key element of *otaku* art, and can be seen in the works of *ero manga* artist Machino Henmaru. These works, which are not always made strictly for the purposes of sexual arousal, further problematise definitions of *otaku* art as 'pornographic'. *Hiropon*'s oversized nipples





4-19. Gârando, 1994
Dragonball H
Manga vol.1 no.18, cover and p15
Tokyo: *Rehabiritêshon*

4-20. Machino Henmaru, 1994
Inu ningyô (dog doll)
Manga no.68 November 1994, p65
Tokyo: Izumi Comics

spurting milk suggest penises, a feature Murakami borrowed from the erotic *manga* of Machino Henmaru, who 'often depicts young women who sprout phalluses from various body parts'. (Cruz 1999, 18) An illustration by Machino shows a girl with multiple phallus shaped objects, in this case dildos, and multiple enlarged nipples which highlight a breast penis conflation typical in much of his work and alluded to by Murakami. (Ill.4-20)

Aida's *DOG* series 1989 (Ill.4-21) seem quite grotesque, the girl has had her limbs amputated at the knees and elbows, in a way like a teddy bear, and shows a similarity to the girl in Machino Henmaru's *Kuma* 1998 (Ill.4-22) Cuteness is 'closely linked to the grotesque, the malformed,' which can be seen as a continuation of the cute aesthetic to the extreme. (Harris 2000, 3)

> The grotesque is cute because the grotesque is pitiable, and pity is the primary emotion of this seductive and manipulative aesthetic that arouses our sympathies by creating anatomical pariahs (Harris 2000, 4)

This is a response to the proliferation of cuteness, what Harris calls an 'antidote' – 'the exact opposite of cuteness: the perverse.' (Harris 2000, 16)

There is a sadistic element in *ero manga*, in which cuteness plays an important role. Machino Henmaru's *manga*, such as *Big Hole* 1998 (Ill.4-23) often include cute, helpless schoolgirl victims being brutalised. Some of Machino's *manga* first appeared in S&M magazines such as *Flamingo*, erotic *manga* which used to produce many talented artists like Hisauchi Michio. (Shigeki Kimura quoted in Machino 1998, n.p.)
Parody is a key feature of these *manga*. Machino's manga *Nuroemon*, for example, is a parody of the children's *manga Doraemon*, in which Nuroemon arrives from the 23rd century to ravish 15 year old Noriko. Machino has also parodied *Cinderella*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, and *The Little Match Girl*. (Machino 1998, n.p.)

In order to explore the connection of cuteness and grotesque, I asked Aida about his *DOG* series and the similarity to Machino's *manga*.

> The situation is really cruel and sadistic, but the style and the atmosphere which the painting generates is completely opposite. They are very relaxed and every day, and the girls are just cute. By doing this I wanted to create a confusing balance that would make it hard for the viewers to know which emotion they should feel. To depict sadistic scenes by cutting off the legs, using passionate and forceful or violent touches happened often in the olden days. Therefore there is no need for me to do it this way and the idea is that it might be better to do the opposite and give it

4-21. Aida Makoto, 1998
DOG (Snow)
Panel, Japanese paper, Japanese mineral, pigment, acrylic
73 x 100 cm
Collection Yamazaki Shinya

4-22. Machino Henmaru, 1998
Kuma chan 2 (Teddy Bear 2)
Canon digital print
60 x 42 cm

4-23. Machino Henmaru, 1986
Big Hole
Manga back cover
Tokyo: Izumi Comics

a quiet touch. (Aida interview 2004)

While Machino parodies *manga*, Aida takes a similar strategy to the institutions of fine art. As he stated in my interview Aida's main concern was with *Nihonga*. These issues of *Nihonga*, and traditional art and popular culture were examined in chapter 3.

Shunga

The *otaku* culture in general is claimed to be a sort of cultural successor of premodern Japanese tradition, mainly the Edo tradition, by leading *otaku* critics such as Okada Toshio and Ôtsuka Eiji for example. (Azuma 2001, n.p.) According to their argument, the consumptive structure of *manga* or *anime* is remarkably similar to that of Kabuki or Jôruri in the Edo era. Murakami's argument is on the same premise, when he draws a direct line from Kanô Sansetsu to Kanada Yoshinori, from the 17th century paintings to 1970s *anime* films. This conception can be analysed as a variation of the prevailing idea that premodernity and postmodernity are directly connected in Japan, and an attractive argument for those wanting to reclaim Japanese popular culture.

Aida Makoto's *The Giant Member Fuji versus King Gidra* 1993, a gigantic painting of a woman in uniform being violated by a many-headed space dragon, mixes *anime* and *manga* with 19th century woodblock prints. (Ill.4-24)

> As many people point it out, there is a close similarity between ukiyo-e, a popular genre of painting in medieval Japan, and comics or animated cartoons which are so popular today. Both are closely connected with the often indecent tastes of people and therefore can't get acknowledged as art; yet they are the most honest and original forms of visual expression for Japanese people. Since my student days it has been a pending question for me to establish a style of painting that could bridge the two genres in an apparent way. (Aida 1999, 7)

Shunga (spring pictures), part of the culture of the *ukiyo* 'Floating World', are libidinous representations from the mid-Edo period. (Screech 1999) A separate category of erotic versions of *ukiyo-e*, Hokusai often signed his *shunga* pictures '*Shishoku Ganko*' (Rampant Penis).

The Giant Member Fuji versus King Gidra is a parody of a well known *shunga* work by Katsushika Hokusai *Kinoe no komatsu (Diver and Two Octopi* from *Old True*

Sophisticates of the Club of Delightful) 1814, from a colour woodblock-printed book or *hanshibon*. (Ill.4-25)

> [T]he Hokusai work harmonized well with the monsters from the series of 'Godzilla' movies and the characters of the TV drama 'Ultraman,' the basic motifs of the so-called otaku (cartoonworm) culture. So I depicted the characters of my work in the method and with materials of animated cartoons so as to make it into a huge celluloid picture. (Aida 1999, 9)

Kinoe no komatsu is itself actually a sophisticated parody containing a subtle textual reference to an ancient folktale, *Taishokan*, the dramatic story of a diving girl who retrieves a precious gem from the Dragon King of the Sea. While the story is essentially a Buddhist moral tale, which first appeared in the 14th century, the overall tone of Hokusai's piece is both humorous and titillating. It is a vulgarization of a sacred tale.

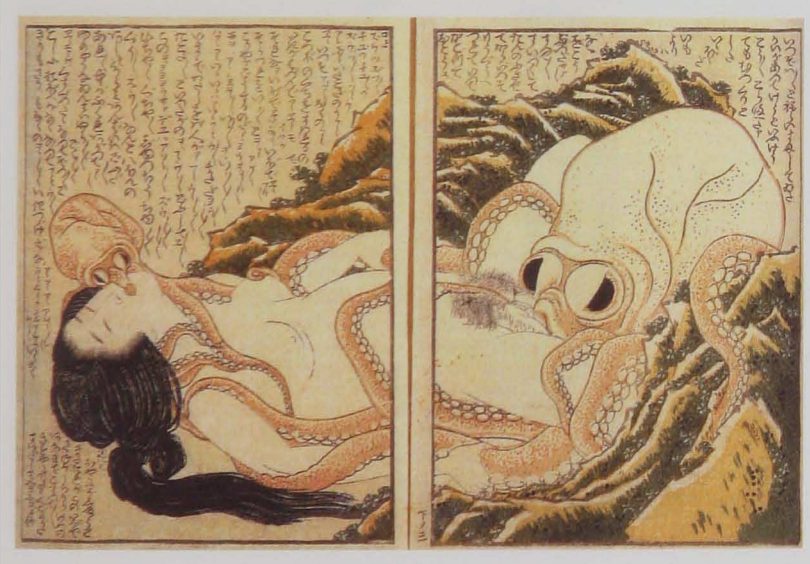
Prints featuring the diver chased by the Dragon King, known popularly as *Tamatori monogatari* or *The Tale of the Taking of the Jewel*, tell the story of gems stolen by a Dragon of the Sea while being sent from one wealthy family to another across Shido bay in Shikoku. The octopus first appeared in a print by Okumura Masanobu in the 1740s. (Ill.4-26) The first sexual diver and octopus was by Kitao Shigemasa in 1781. From the late 18th century onward the subject became popular in *ukiyo-e*, Katsukawa Shunshô's version is one example. (Ill.4-27) Kitagawa Utamaro and Ishikawa Toyonobu had already popularised sexualised images of female divers (they dive for abalone), encouraged by terms connecting sex with water, such as *mizu shôbai* (water trade, meaning prostitution). (Talerico 2001)

> Is this a scene of sexual pleasure? In a genre overwhelmingly dominated by phallo-centric works, men are absent here. Hokusai creates an unforgettable image epitomising female sexual gratification. (Talerico 2001, 25)

In Machino Henmaru's version of the octopus tale, *Tako shôjo* (octopus girl) 1998, (Ill.4-28) '*Tako*' means octopus, but was also Edo period slang for vagina. Looking at these illustrations of the same subject, the images can be viewed as a kind of progressive series from the 19th century representations to Machino's contemporary version, and highlight a development according to the aesthetic of cuteness, previously outlined in chapter 1, and underline the importance of cuteness as a key aesthetic of the 20th century.

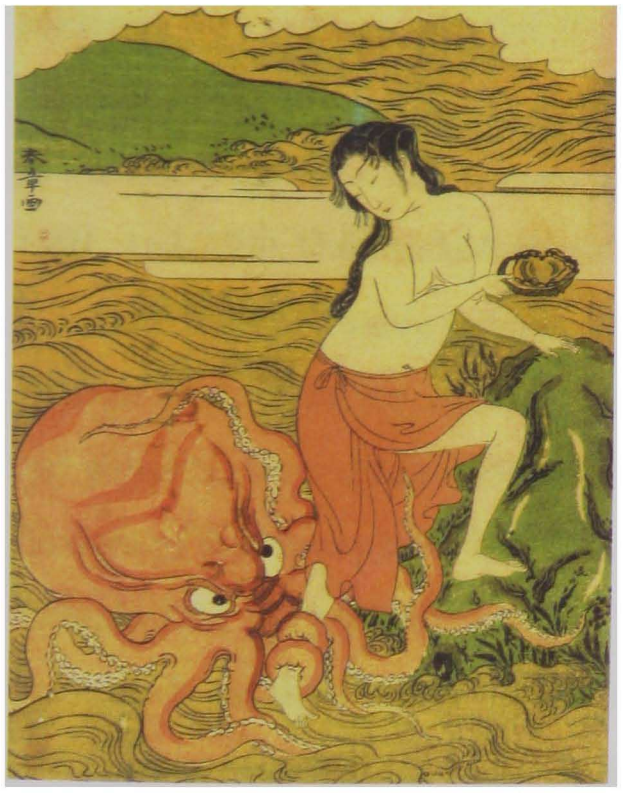
Aida Makoto's *Uguisudani-zu* (Picture of Uguisudani) 1990 provides another link to the

4-24. Aida Makoto, 1993
The Giant Member Fuji versus King Gidora
Acetate film, acrylic, eyelets
310 x 410 cm



4-25. Katsushika Hokusai, 1814
Diver and Two Octopi
From *Kinoe no komatsu* (Old True Sophisticates of the Club of DelightfulSkills) vol.3
Colour woodblock printed book
Collection Dr. Gerhard Pulverer, Cologne

4-26. Okumura Masanobu c.1740
Tamatori monogatari (The Tale of the Jewel)
Woodcut
Worcester Art Museum, Mass., John Chandler Bancroft Collection



4-27. Katsukawa Shunshô, 1773-74
Diver and Amorous Octopus
Colour woodblock print
25.2 x 19 cm
Collection Max Palevsky

4-28. Machino Henmaru, 1998
Tako shôjo (octopus girl)
From *Kôkoku Hihyô* no.226 April 1999, p69

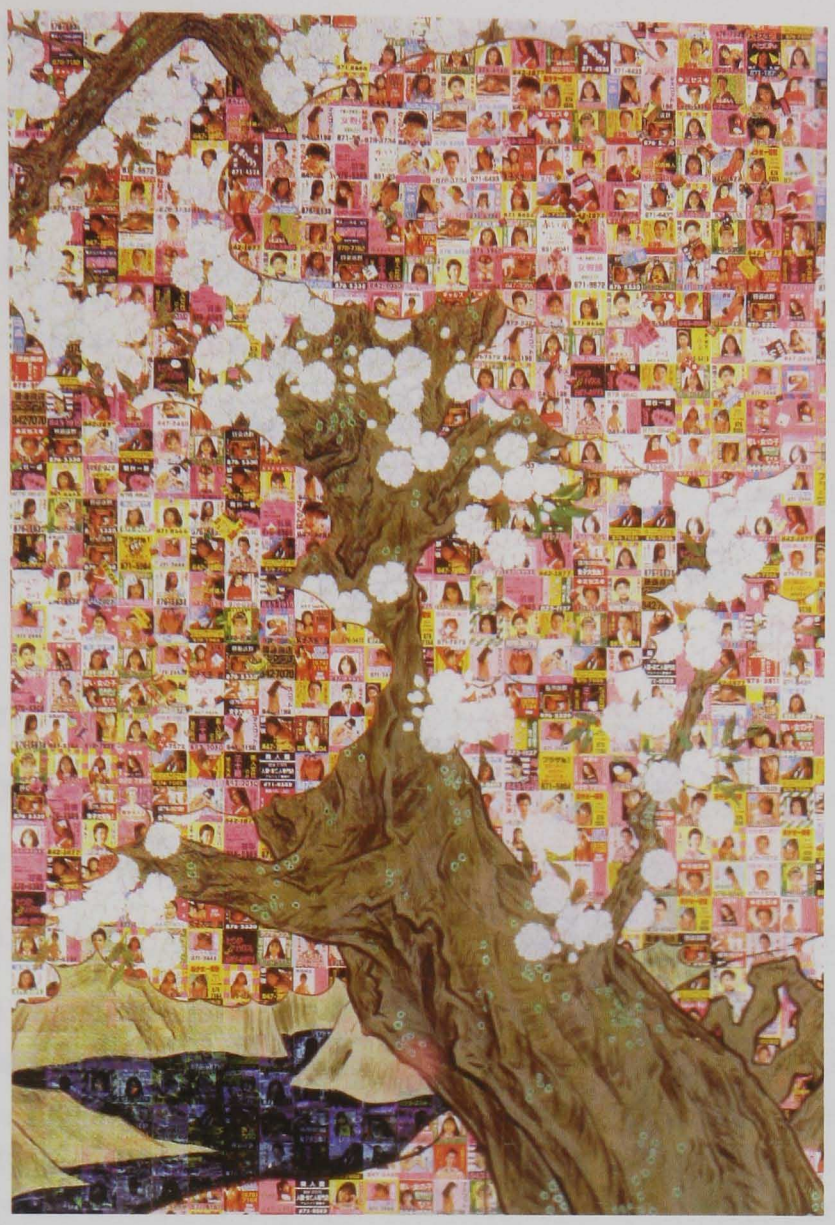
Edo period. (Ill.4-29) and there is a similarity here with Murakami and his referencing of Edo period artists.

> Mixing contemporary Japanese popular icons with the conventions of traditional Japanese paintings, Aida presented a similar strategy to that cultivated by Murakami Takashi in his 'super flat' aesthetic. But while Murakami's mixture of classical decorative design and eccentric drawing of Japanese animation emphasizes the continuity of the anti-mimetic orientation typified by playful distortion of nature in the pre-modern and post-modern Japanese pictorial expressions, Aida uses the classical design and framework in order to comment on the unchanging popular interest in pornography. (Matsui 2002, 150)

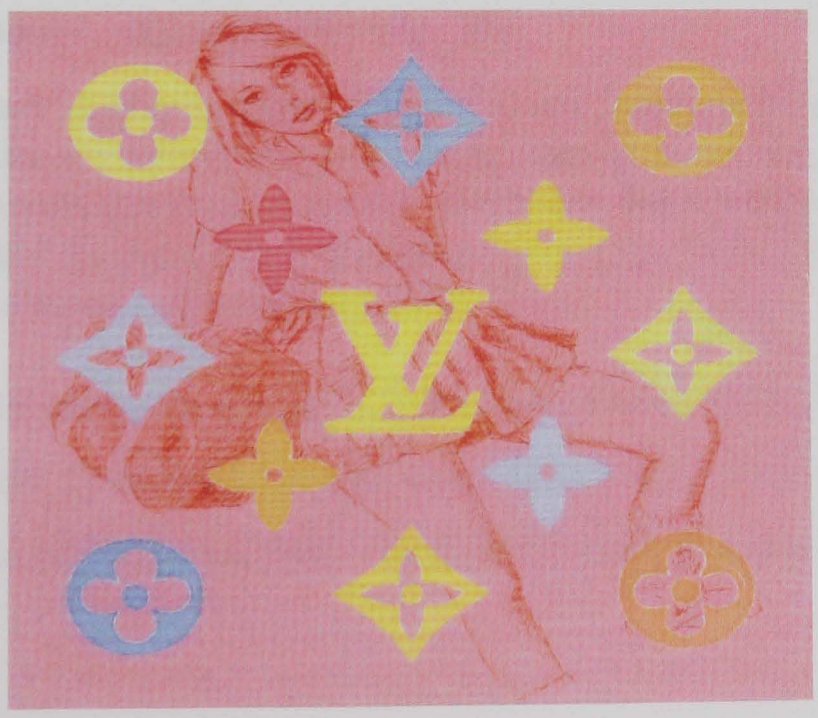
Aida's work depicts a cherry tree in full bloom, where the blossoms are actually sex phone cards. fliers with photos of prostitutes and phone numbers, for what's referred to in Japan as 'delivery health', applied as traditionally gold leaf would be. The Uguisudani area of Tokyo, which is near Ueno Park, famous for its cherry trees, has a famous red light district, with many love hotels. Aida's *Uguisudani-zu* featured in 'Sex and Consumerism: Contemporary Art in Japan', the 2001 UK touring exhibition, and book that followed. (Lloyd and Roberts eds. 2001) Masuyama Hiroshi's *Bonsai IV* 2001, also part of that exhibition. is also concerned with 'the commodification of the female body in contemporary culture.' (Lloyd 2002, 78) (Ill.4-30)

In the Edo Period we can see the beginnings of commercialised pornography. (Buckley 1991, 163-193) The marketing surrounding pornographic comic books, and the increasing number of pornographic computer games for example, is a natural development of *shunga*. *Shunga* production was often in cooperation with suppliers of sex aids. *Bijinga* (beautiful girl pictures) were often used as fliers advertising brothels. *Sakura*, the delicate pink flowers of the cherry tree, because of their beauty, fragility, and transience, were a popular metaphor for the prostitutes of the Yoshiwara district, a red-light area in the Edo period that now hosts the country's greatest concentration of 'soap lands', and references to *sakura* are still popular in contemporary adult entertainment areas.

The extraordinary exaggeration of genitals in *shunga* is often commented upon. Utagawa Kuniyoshi's *shunga* for example featured massive genitals. But this is not mere 'phallic prowess', for vaginas are exaggerated too. Timon Screech suggested one reason for distended organs: genitals and heads are matched in size, so that organs are not merely large, but identical in dimension with a head, representing an egalitarianism of thought and



4-29. Aida Makoto, 1990
Uguisudani-zu
Acrylic, sex phonecall cards, Japanese mineral pigment, panel
190 x 245 cm



4-30. Masuyama Hiroshi, 2001
Bonsai IV
Acrylic, mixed media on canvas
45 x 45 cm

sex-drive. (Screech 2002, 23-40) Nicholas Bornoff links the fascination with close-up genitals with ancient Shintô worship. The phallic deity appears in Shintô, for example Kanamara-sama shrine (the metal phallus deity shrine), fertility festivals, *kagura* (a shrine dance), the Yamagami *matsuri* (festival) in Chiba (where a vast wooden member is plunged into a straw vagina), the Tagata shrine *matsuri* and the Jibeta festival where children lick phallic shaped lollipops. Also from the Edo period, the *harigata* (dildo) made of wood or porcelain, was sometimes carved to represent Otafuku, patron of feminine sexual appetite, or the erotic goddess Benten. (Bornoff 1991, 242)

Otsubi-e are the genre of genital close-up in *shunga*, of which Hokusai's vulva close-ups are an example. Baudrillard, while ignoring the Japanese tradition of seeing the vagina as sacred, focuses on the development of telescopes, microscopes, and other scientific optical equipment in the 18th century, which profoundly altered the construction of sight.

> Consequent to the anatomical zoom, the dimension of the real is abolished, the distance implied by the gaze gives way to an instantaneous, exacerbated representation, that of sex in its pure state, stripped not just of all seduction, but of its image's very potentiality. Sex so close that it merges with its own representation: the end of perspectival space, and therefore, that of the imaginary and of phantasy – end of the scene, end of an illusion. (Baudrillard 1990, 29)

For Baudrillard pornography has a visual grammar all of its own. 'Perhaps pornography is only an allegory, that is to say, a forcing of signs, a baroque enterprise of over-signification touching on the "grotesque".' (Baudrillard 1990, 28)

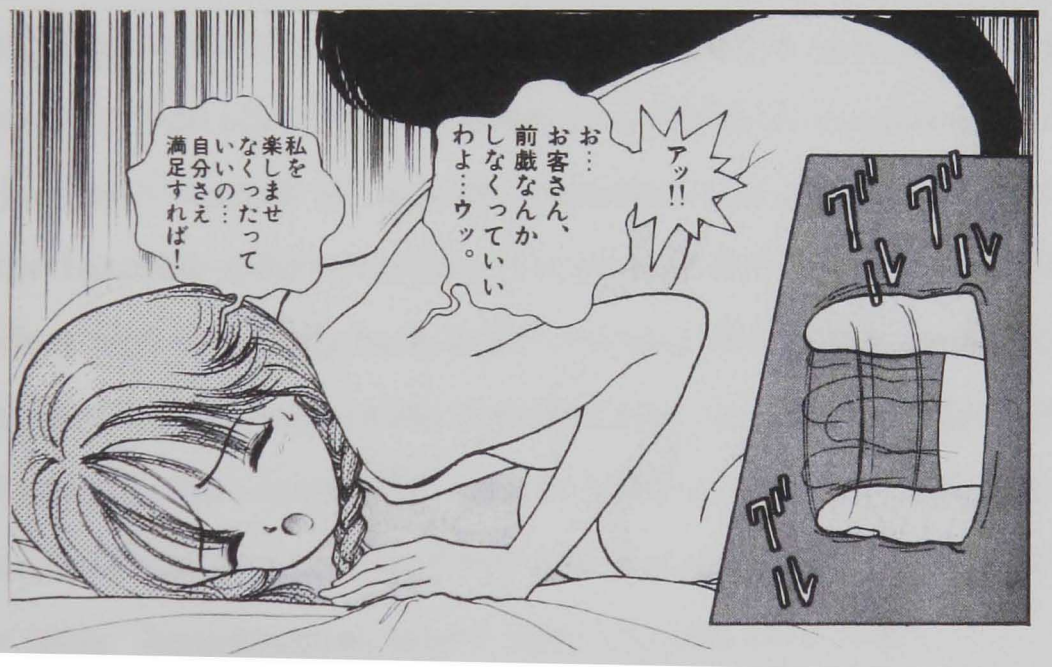
> The only phantasy in pornography, if there is one, is thus not a phantasy of sex, but of the real, and its absorption into something other than the real, the hyperreal. Pornographic voyeurism is not a sexual voyeurism, but a voyeurism of representation and its perdition, a dizziness born of the loss of the scene and the irruption of the obscene. (Baudrillard 1990, 29)

There is an extra level of close-up, unseen in live-action pornography, for obvious reasons, which is the interior view. Utagawa Kunisada's woodblock print *Vaginal inspection* 1837 for example. (Ill.4-31) A page from U-Jin's *Angel* 1989 shows a contemporary version. (Ill.4-32)

Baudrillard also refers to modern Japanese striptease clubs where men are handed a magnifying glass.

> The equivalent of the conveyor belt here, is the Japanese vaginal cyclorama – it

4-31. Utagawa Kunisada, 1837
Vaginal inspection
Woodblock print



4-32. U-Jin, 1989
Angel
Manga vol.2 p33
Young Sunday Comics
Tokyo: Shôgakukan

> outdoes any striptease. Prostitutes, their thighs open, sitting on the edge of a platform, Japanese workers in their shirt-sleeves (it's a popular spectacle), permitted to shove their noses up to their eyeballs within the woman's vagina in order to see, to see better – but what? (Baudrillard 1990, 30)

This, for Baudrillard, is a moment of absolute obscenity, 'a moment of visual veracity that goes far beyond sexual possession. A sublime pornography,' and an ' extremely serious, infantile act borne of an undivided fascination with the mirror of the female organ.' (Baudrillard 1990,30) If the obscene is a matter of representation and not of sex,

> it must explore the very interior of the body and the viscera. Who knows what profound pleasure is to be found in the visual dismemberment of mucous membranes and smooth muscles? Our pornography still retains a restricted definition. Obscenity has an unlimited future. (Baudrillard 1990, 32)

Shunga and *manga* both seem to fit within Baudrillard's construction of the postmodern, and provides yet another connection of the pre-modern to the postmodern.

In the 1980s, at the beginning of Japanese postmodernity, the Edo era and its culture was strongly preferred by many writers, artists and critics. Their preference toward the association of 1980s postmodern society and the pre-modern Edo is explained, following Azuma's argument, by the attempted erasure of the traumatic memory of the defeat in the World War II. The reevaluation of Edo culture is socially required in such an atmosphere. Azuma cites Roland Barthes, who also depicted Japanese tradition as a realisation of postmodernism. This kind of 'Orientalism' was imported back into Japanese society in the 1980s and since then the Japanese themselves began to explain their postmodern reality based on their pre-modern tradition going back to the Edo era. The deepest psychosocial element beneath this tendency is the impossible desire to deny the post-war American cultural influence, and *otaku* culture originated from this desire. Now Japanese society has been so deeply Europeanised and Americanised that any nostalgic return towards its traditional, original, or 'pure' Japaneseness, seems fake. (Azuma 2001, n.p.)

Rorikon

Ninagawa Mika's photo *Like a Peach* 2002, (Ill.4-33) while it resonates with the *shôjo* images of Hiromix previously discussed in chapter 2, it also evokes U-Jin's *manga Peach* 2001. (Ill.4-34) *Manga* artist U-Jin achieved considerable notoriety in Japan when his comic *Angel* became the subject of a censorship campaign. The Association to Protect

Children from Comics saw it as pornography invading children's comics. In October 1990 *Angel* was cut from the weekly *shônen manga Young Sunday*, and became separated from weekly *manga* by an adult seal. Erotic comics have an air of illicit fantasy. As *manga* lose that subversive air, more explicit *ero manga* take it over. *Ero manga* take on this marginal, guerrilla-like character. The place *ero manga* assume in a wider culture, and how *manga* are consumed is an important issue. In Japan, weekly *manga* are consumed very openly and in public spaces. Hayashibara Hikari's *Shôkôjo Lolita girls collection* is an example of this type of cuteness in quite hardcore pornography. (Ill.4-35)

Since the 1980s, *rorikon* (Lolita Complex) erotica has gradually become more and more widespread. Lolita Complex commonly refers to the predilection of a middle-aged man to desire a young girl. While there are specific *rorikon* hardcore adult *manga*, sex with young girls and schoolgirls in uniform frequently appears in weekly *shônen manga*. Setsu Shigematsu even argues it is a 'norm' in commercial *manga* mass-produced and marketed for a male audience. (Setsu 1999, 129)

> [T]here is still a market which cherishes the impossible dream that inside every schoolgirl there is not only a sex kitten waiting to get out, but also a cunning concealed mechanism by which she can pop back inside once playtime's over, no harm done and no one any the wiser. Whereas the magical girl series helped little girls grow up through fantasy into mature, sensible young women, lolikon anime catered to the perpetual infantilism of every under confident, over optimistic male. (McCarthy 1998, 51)

Nagai Gô's *manga Harenchi Gakuen* (Shameless School), published in weekly *Shûkan shônen jump* from 1968 to 1972, was an earlier controversial *manga*, about a school whose teachers and students were all sex perverts, which became a sensation. Boys peep at girls changing, and girls pull up their skirts and show off their pants.
Parents, teachers, and politicians hysterically attacked the *manga*'s immorality, and in the end the magazine publisher was forced to cancel it. In the last episode the *manga* parodies real life, as the PTA teams up with conservative politicians to destroy the school. They order the army to attack the school, the teachers and students fight back, a girl is decapitated by bullets, guts spill from a boy's stomach.

Funabashi Kuniko highlights this comic series as the first in treating the female body purely as an object. In the 1970s more explicit adult comics took off and, argues Funabashi, encouraged violence and exploitation of the female sex by increasing the

4-33. Ninagawa Mika, 2002
Like a Peach
Exhibition flier, Spiral Garden, Tokyo

4-34. U-Jin, 2001
Peach
Manga cover no.2
Young Sunday Comics
Tokyo: Shôgakukan

4-35. *Lolita Girls Collection*, 2004
Manga cover
Ex Comics

4-36. *Young Animal*, April 25, 2003
Manga cover

availability of sexually stimulating information for men. (Funabashi 1995, 255-263) The issue of *manga's* influence on youth is one that is often raised, particularly since the Miyazaki murder incident and the *Aum* subway gas attack, and especially by groups such as the PTA. A cover of the weekly *manga Young Animal* showing Japanese model Megumi posing as a sex instructor might suggest perhaps an educational role of *manga*. (Ill.4-36) The weekly manga *Young Animal* is not regarded as adults only and is sold in most conveniences stores such as 7-11, and Family Mart, alongside adults only material.

A number of theoretical interpretations exist surrounding the proliferation of *rorikon manga*. Texts tend to focus on the question of whether the Lolita Complex in Japan is a reaction to feminism, and a turn toward less challenging girls. Confronted with more powerful and independent women, have Japanese men reacted to new more powerful women by infantilizing them, a case of 'aging, immature, sexually insecure and/or impotent males longing for girls too naïve to challenge their virility'? (Bornoff 1991, 119)

> The themes of *Lolicom* manga written by and for men express a complex fixation with young women, or perhaps the idea of young women (*shôjo*). The little girl heroines of *Lolicom* manga simultaneously reflect an awareness of the increasing power and centrality of young women in society, as well as a reactive desire to see these young women infantilised, undressed and subordinate. Despite the inappropriateness of their old-fashioned attitudes, many young men have not accepted the possibility of a new role, encompassing greater autonomy for women, in Japanese society. These men who are confounded by their inability to relate to assertive and insubordinate contemporary young women, fantasize about these unattainable girls in their own boys' girls' *Lolicom* manga. (Kinsella 2000, 122)

Kinsella argues the increasingly intense gaze with which young men examine young girls is 'both passive and aggressive'. It is a gaze of both fear and desire, 'stimulated not least by the perception of lost privileges over women, which accumulated during the 1980s.' (Kinsella 2000, 124)

A quite typical voyeur scene taken from *Angel* raises the issue of voyeurism and the power of the gaze. (Ill.4-37) Laura Mulvey, in her essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (Mulvey 1975), distinguishes between two modes of looking for the film spectator: voyeuristic, and fetishistic, which she presents in Freudian terms as responses to male 'castration anxiety'. (Mulvey 1992, 27) Where voyeuristic looking involves a controlling gaze, fetishistic looking, in contrast, involves the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than

dangerous. Indeed Allison puts forward the argument that when men look at pornography they are seeking reassurances against phallic lack not in women but in themselves. (Allison 2000b) It is their own feelings of insecurity in a society, which has made the penis such a symbol of power, that activates the pleasure in viewing women as objects, she argues.

> Readers are driven more by the fear of impotency than the swagger of phallic strength, and by rage over being variously beaten down than by desire for sexual companionship or orgasmic release. (Allison 2000b, 77)

This notion of impotency which emerges in this interpretation of *rorikon manga* is a key issue, one which Murakami refers to, and will be examined in more detail with respect to *otaku* later in this chapter.

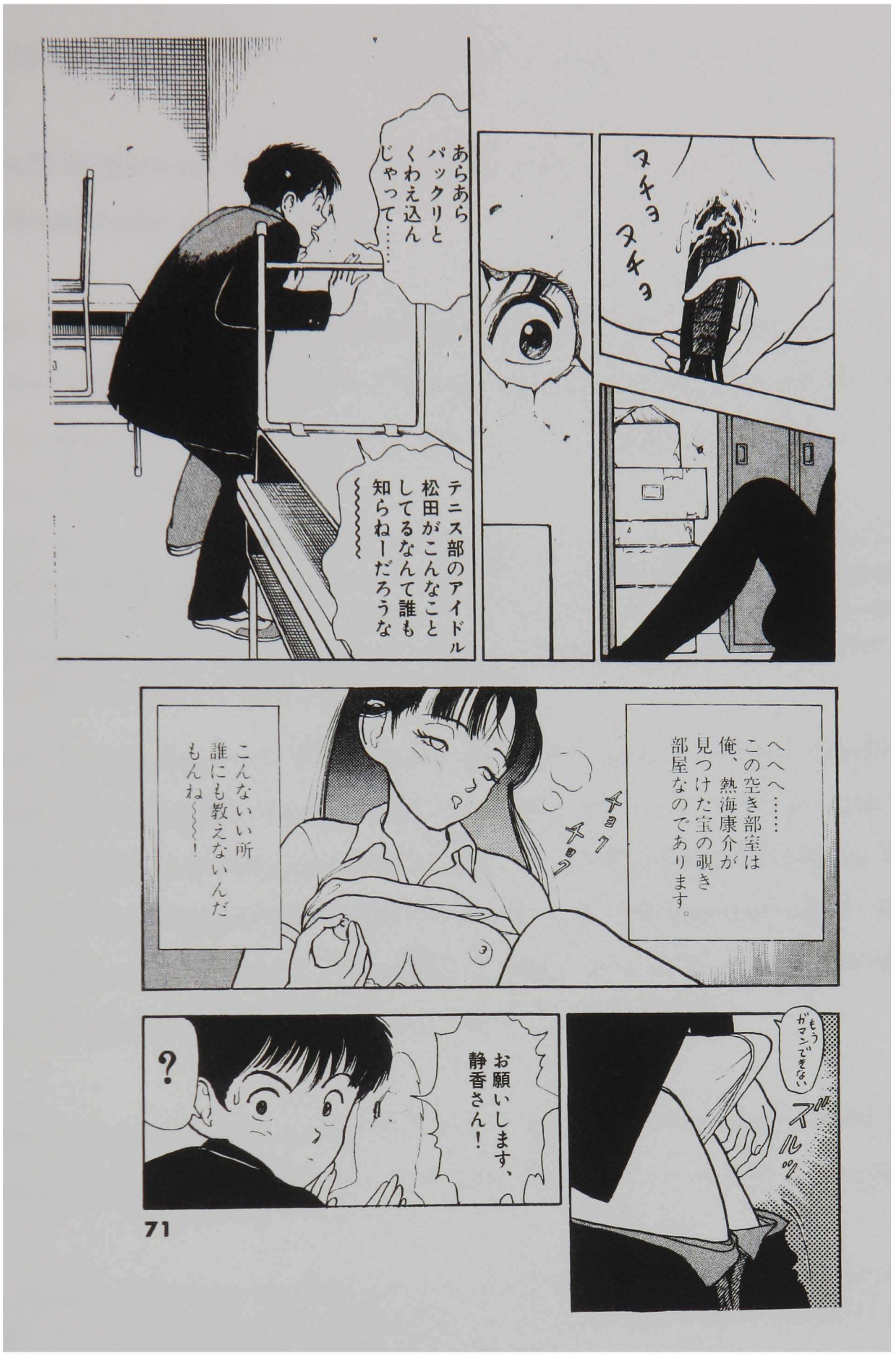
Susan Napier gives the first indication that this still quite literal interpretation of *rorikon manga* might not be entirely conclusive. She asks if it is possible to see an ideological subtext to *anime* pornography that goes beyond male/female relations to embrace the issue of overall power in society. In this reading the male demons represent not just some kind of revenge fantasy against the female but against the constricting nature of Japanese society itself. (Napier 2000, 81) Setsu cites Akagi Akira's article 'The Beautiful Young Girl Syndrome: The Desire Known as *Rorikon*', arguing that the original meaning of *rorikon* has been transformed, no longer referring to middle-aged man and young girl, or girl-child pornography. The rise of *rorikon* manga is connected to the rise of cuteness in the rest of Japanese society.

> It is not the age of the girl that is attractive, but a form of 'cuteness' (*kawairashii*) that she represents. The idealization of cuteness in Japan is certainly not specifically a male-fixation, but a broader based 'norm' reproduced and marketed for child, female, and male markets.
> (Setsu 1999, 131)

John Whittier Treat also alludes to this arguing the Miyazaki murder case was the result of the commodification of cuteness, and the tendency to render young women as commodities. (Treat 1993, 358)

Treat refers to Shibusawa Tatsuhiko's writings on the Lolita Complex in Japan and its implications, arguing *shôjo* are endlessly erotic precisely because they are passive beings, and both socially and sexually the *shôjo* is utterly ignorant.

> And being ignorant, the *shôjo*, like little birds and dogs, symbolizes a total object,



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4-37. U-Jin, 1989
Angel Manga vol.2 p71
Young Sunday Comics
Tokyo: Shôgakukan

> the object of play, and one that cannot express itself of its own accord. (Treat 1993, 363)

Shibusawa will be discussed in more detail with regard to Aida Makoto and the influence of Georges Bataille later in this chapter.

Pornographic *anime* do however also often feature powerful female characters. Powerful girls characters popular in *manga* and *ero manga* would seem to problematise the passive female role to some extent. Susan Napier's study of pornographic *anime* such as *La Blue Girl*, or *Twin Dolls*, highlights this aspect.

> While the female body inevitably remains an object of the male gaze, even the most violent pornography frequently represents it as active and capable of intimidating transformation. Although the women in these films are far from being icons of emancipation, they are no closer to being the passive objects of domination described by many critics. (Napier 2000, 65)

In Nagai Gô's *manga* and *anime Cutie Honey*, the transformation sequence is called 'Honey Flash'. In the original *manga*, which was first published in 1971, and was followed by a TV *anime* a few years later, and then another TV series in 1990, the heroine is an *OL* (office lady) by day, and super hero fighter by night. Anno Hideaki has recently directed a live action version of *Cutie Honey* 2004, starring Satô Eriko. The schoolgirl heroines in U-Jin's *anime Pictures from High School* are another example.

Rorikon discussed in conjunction with the issue of censorship raises the question of whether many of the characteristics of *ero manga* are actually a result of strict censorship laws.

> In Japan as with any other society, the limits defined by the obscenity law have had their own influence on the artistic representation of sex, even to the point of perverting it. (McCarthy and Clements 1998, 19)

Forbidding the representation of pubic hair and genitalia resulted in sex acts involving undeveloped genitalia both literally (by making the characters prepubescent) and figuratively (by keeping the image graphically simple). Allison's study asks the questions why, how and with what effects has the state in post-war Japan policed obscenity according the principle of not allowing pubic hair or genitals. (Allison 2000b)

Following Foucault's insight, Allison argues that the state has in fact endorsed and encouraged a sexual economy of a particular order, one that constructs the stimulation and

4-38. Miyasu Nonki, 2002
Tokyo Nanpa Street
Weekly Young Jump, February

4-39. Machino Henmaru, 1994
Inu ningyô (dog doll)
Manga cover no.68 November
Tokyo: Izumi Comics

simulation of sexuality as a fantasy not dependent on the graphic display of genitalia. What results is a public culture in which the conjuring of sex depends on body imagery that either decentres the genitals or alludes to them indirectly. Thus there is a tolerance for the preponderance in Japanese media of peep shots up the skirts of girls and women at the ever-present white pants; the fetishisation of body parts other than genitals, such as buttocks and breasts; the infantilization of females, who are (or are made to appear) prepubescent and lacking pubic hair; and acts of sadomasochism in which there is no genital copulation, stimulation, or exposure. Sexual tropes such as voyeurism, infantilization, and sadomasochism, all avoid the realism of genitalia, which centres the state's definition of obscenity, are therefore not classed as obscene. By focusing on young girls, Allison argues, mothers are excluded, thus protecting the family and home. (Allison 2000b, 150)

The censorship law banning penises lead to a proliferation of penis substitutes, and is one argument often cited to explain the frequency of rape by tentacles often seen in *manga*. Usually the penis is erased in *ero manga*, literally, becoming visible by its very absence. Another common strategy is making it cute. Miyasu Nonki's *Tokyo Nanpa Street* 2002, published in *Weekly Young Jump*, is one example. (Ill.4-38) Setsu argues *rorikon* is typified by the presence of phallus-substitutes, and links this erasure of the penis to a symptom of performance anxiety, (Setsu 1999) while Allison finds a positive feminist interpretation.

> One aspect of *ero manga*, however, strikes me as potentially radical. That is the decentering of sex, gender, and even power from male genitalia (or at least naturalized genitalia). (Allison 2000b, 78)

Machino's *Inu ningyô (dog doll)* 1994 provides an example of both. (Ill.4-39) Machino's *manga*, popular with *otaku*, leads this enquiry into a thorough analysis of the world of *otaku*.

Otaku as Subculture

Japanese conceptions of *otaku* are as obsessed fans, technological fetishists, avid collectors, antisocial outcasts, and borderline psychopaths. While not exactly a 'spectacular' subculture as Dick Hebdige has typically examined (*otaku* usually have little outward expression, no extravagant style, except for perhaps a minority who participate publicly in

kosupure), *otaku* do display some classic subculture characteristics as described by Hebdige, such as condemnation by society, and the creation of moral panics. (Hebdige 1979) The similarities are enough to make valid a temporary insertion of *otaku* within Hebdige's framework, and examine how cuteness in particular has been used in what Hebdige terms 'subcultural deviance', and the mutation of an existing code. (Hebdige 1979, 130-131) The question this section examines is whether it is possible to find in *otaku* culture a resistance to the hegemony of consumption, based on Hebdige's definition that equates subcultures with resistant modes of being. (Hebdige 1979, 5-19) *Otaku* are part of a consumer subculture that exists parallel to the mainstream consumer culture and exists just beneath the radar. Subcultures exist within and in reference to larger cultures.

Anti-*otaku* prejudice has been around since the 1970s, but it reached new heights in the early 1990s after a serial killer in Tokyo, Miyazaki Tsutomu, who raped 4 children and ate parts of their bodies, turned out to be an *otaku* when he was arrested in 1989. His bedroom, when it was discovered, was crammed with *manga*, and *ero manga*. Newspapers reported his arrest with a photo taken in his small room where thousands of videotapes and comics were piled up to its ceiling, covering the walls and windows. Consequently, many people, including leading journalists and politicians, began to think of *otaku* culture as filled with sexual and violent imagery and a symbol of pathological problems in the young high-tech generation.

> When Miyazaki's room was revealed to the public, the mass media announced that it was otaku space. However, it was just like my room. Actually, my mother was very surprised to see his room and said, 'His room is like yours. Are you OK?' Of course, I was OK. In fact, all of my friends' rooms were similar to his, too. (Murakami quoted in Wakasa 2001, n.p.)

This incident led to a massive public debate about the influence of *manga* on children in Japan, there was a nationwide panic about *manga* subculture, *ero manga* and particularly *rorikon manga*, and the concept of an *otaku* changed its meaning at the hands of the media.

In 1995 *Aum Shinrikyô*, a religious cult, scattered poison gas in the Tokyo metro. *Aum* was known for their eschatological dogmas deeply influenced by 1970s and 1980s *manga*, and received sympathy from *otaku* even after their terrorist attack. The *Aum* affair tackled the cultural territory of *otaku*. (Azuma 2001, n.p.) The original scenario of Anno Hideaki's *Shin seiki Evangelion (Neon Genesis Evangelion)* 1995 was shockingly close to the political motivation of *Aum*, such as the fight against an unknown enemy; Evangelions (referred to as EVAs) battle against angels who change their form for example into

pyramids, or shadows. Anno highlights the self-isolation and exclusiveness of *Aum*, and their loss of contact with reality, and in Anno's view this again is very close to the situation of *otaku*.

Ayanami Rei's apartment in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* is completely undecorated with walls of bare concrete, underwear and garbage scattered everywhere, and the curtains are closed to the outside world. Bloody bandages from a training accident are strewn about; on top of her desk there are first-aid bandages and large amounts of medicine, beakers, and thick foreign books with Post-Its in the pages. In the scenes of Rei's apartment two images intersect: one is of the refugee, a post-war childhood, the other is the scientific. The intersection of these two motifs, Mick Broderick argues, recalls *Satiyam – Aum*'s scientific laboratories. (Broderick 1998, n.p.) According to Azuma, and based on his interviews with Anno, Anno is attacking what he sees as a negative element of *otaku*, one that had prompted comparisons to be drawn with *Aum* in the popular media. (Azuma 2001, n.p.)

Anno had progressed from the *otaku* culture during the 1980s, and what he was attempting was to eliminate some of what he saw as its more dangerous elements. One of the problems he saw was that while there was a great number of *otaku*, at the same time they were completely closed, anti-social and isolated. From the beginning of the making of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* he wanted to break the isolation of *otaku* by increasing the number of *anime* fans in an attempt to break open '*otakuness*', while creating a self-tormenting, auto-destructive critique of *otaku*, 'a simultaneous deep absorption into the anime-like while maintaining a distance from it.' (Broderick 1998) However, it was enthusiastically received among *otaku*, forcing Anno to change the entire conceptual structure of the work. (Azuma 2001, n.p.)

Morikawa tries to play down the Lolita fetish as 'bad taste,' arguing *otaku* are defensive rather than subversive, representing instead a simple straying from the mainstream.

> The objects of *otaku* taste tend to be very 'Made in Japan.' Not that otaku are in any way nationalistic in their thought, their sensibilities merely apply close to home within the sphere of contemporary Japanese culture. Thus, otaku aesthetics represent a self-consciously shadow image of 'Japan as seen in 'kitsch' things. (Morikawa 2004, 36)

Moeru, a word almost exclusively used by *otaku*, representing an almost secret in-group

language characteristic of other subcultural groups, is often confused with *rorikon*, but there is a subtle yet distinct line that separates them. (Morikawa 2003, 28)

The kanji for the word *moe* is usually associated with the budding of plants, but there is another association for *otaku* with *anime* and computer games. *Moe* refers to a feeling of liking for cute characters and their composition, and typifies the concept of *kawaii*.

> In recent years, the word '*moe*' signifying a special kind of affection toward *anime* and computer game heroines has rapidly gained currency among Japanese otaku, typically nuanced with shades of self-derision or sexual feelings perhaps.' (Saitô 2004, 40)

One example is the popular character Heidi from the *anime* series *Alps no shôjo Heidi* (*Heidi of the Alps*) 1974 directed by Takahata Isao, which also involved Miyazaki Hayao. Just as a weak little girl like Heidi can be *moe*, a high-class daughter can also be *moe*. *Moe* can also be used with reference to specific elements, spectacles, for example can be *moe*. *Manga* artists consciously use popular *moe* elements in their character design.

The word first appeared in the 1993 *shôjo manga* by Yui Ayumi *Taiyô ni sumasshu*, where the character Takatsu Megumi used it as a fan call. To many fans of *moe*, the focus is often on supporting and watching rather than to imagine being actively 'involved' sexually with the character. Morikawa Kaichirô, who argues their position is like that of a protective elder brother to a younger sister, also draws similarities between *moe* and the 'idol craze' of the 1970s and 1980s, where an 'ordinary' but cute girl would come out of nowhere to become a popular singer. (Morikawa 2003, 28)

Saitô Tamaki examines the significance of cuteness to *otaku* from a psychoanalytic perspective and plays down the subversive potential.

> Taking pleasure in things children have usually outgrown by middle school at the latest, otaku remain profoundly attached to their chosen 'objects of transference' well past adolescence into adulthood. Such behaviour is frequently regarded as escapist; hence the cliché criticisms that otaku are 'immature as individuals' or 'confuse fiction and reality. (Saitô 2004, 40)

Saitô argues that while *otaku* actually 'exhibit an intimate familiarity with fictional contexts', they resort 'to fictions as a means of 'possessing' love objects. (Saitô 2004, 40) Subcultures are produced in response to specific historical conditions, and this response embodies a refusal, argues Hebdige.

> Subcultures are therefore expressive forms but what they express is, in the last instance, a fundamental tension between those in power and those condemned to subordinate positions and second-class lives. (Hebdige 1979, 132)

Murakami's figure works in particular represent an exploration of this code, the *otaku* way of expressing.

> If we are to think in formal terms at all, subcultural styles are more usefully regarded as mutations and extensions of existing codes rather than as the 'pure' expression of creative drives, and above all they should be seen as *meaningful* mutations. Sometimes these forms will be disfigured and disfiguring. At such times, no doubt, this will be their 'point'. They are counter posed against the symbolic order of structured appearances – the syntax which positions the producer over and against that which he or she produces. In the face of such an order, they are bound on occasion to assume monstrous and unnatural features. (Hebdige 1979, 131)

In this way we might make a distinction between the consumption of *rorikon manga* by non-*otaku* and *otaku*, who are acting on a more symbolic level.

One cause of the popular aversion to *otaku* culture is connected with a socio-psychological problem of Japanese post-war identity, according to Azuma. (Azuma 2001, n.p.) Since the end of World War II, he explains, the Japanese have long suffered from a serious difficulty to evaluate and be proud of their cultural tradition. One reason is political; in Japan, any affirmative attitude towards Japanese identity has been likely thought to be a political right-wing expression, as an action of forgetting or liquidating Japanese military 'crime' in the war. *Otaku* culture reflects this mixed, hybrid, condition; that is, the paradox that we cannot find any Japaneseness without post-war American pop culture. (Azuma 2001)

This is an issue that Murakami had touched on before in his essay 'Impotence Culture – Anime' for the 2001 exhibition 'My Reality – Contemporary Art and the Culture of Japanese Animation.'

> Behind the flashy titillation of anime lies the shadow of Japan's trauma after the defeat of the Pacific War. The world of anime is a world of impotence. (Murakami 2001, 58)

This resonates with Aida's assertion in my interview with him discussed in chapter 2 that the use of the cute *Pipo-kun* by the police is the result of a loss of dignity.
In this sense, *otaku* culture is essentially 'nationalistic' though its characteristic and expression are far from those of traditional ordinary nationalism. (Azuma 2001, n.p.)

Azuma highlights the example of the TV *anime Spaceship Yamato*, in which a spaceship saves the earth from an alien attack. The spaceship *Yamato* is made from a salvaged famous Japanese navy warship sunk in World War II. Azuma argues that while *manga*, *anime*, computer games, are all of American origin, imported from the U.S. with its post-war occupation policy, o*taku* culture is a result of the 'domestication' of this post-war American culture. *Otaku* culture is a sort of collective expression of post-war Japanese nationalism, although their surroundings in reality are thoroughly invaded and traumatized by American pop culture. This paradox necessarily leads *otaku* artists and writers to a twisted, ambivalent, complicated sort of self-caricaturized expression of Japaneseness. You can find this obsessive distortion of identity, for example, in Bome's sculptures, Murakami's paintings or Anno's films. (Azuma 2001, n.p.)

The influx of American culture, and a reactionary peace culture after the war, is not the natural continuation of a culture, Azuma states. Because of the defeat Japanese popular culture abruptly changes course, filling in the gaps with ingredients from America, and so Azuma argues it is false/fake. (Morikawa 2003, 93) Azuma argues that Japanese culture is basically made out of the transformation of foreign culture into a Japanese style, and into Japanese culture, and *otaku* culture reflects this mixed, hybrid, bastardized condition. Morikawa, while citing Azuma, also points out that the argument of a distortion due to the influence of a foreign culture is an old one, used since early times well before World War II, and what needs to be examined is how 'taste' works in this transformation of imported culture into Japanese style. (Morikawa 2003)

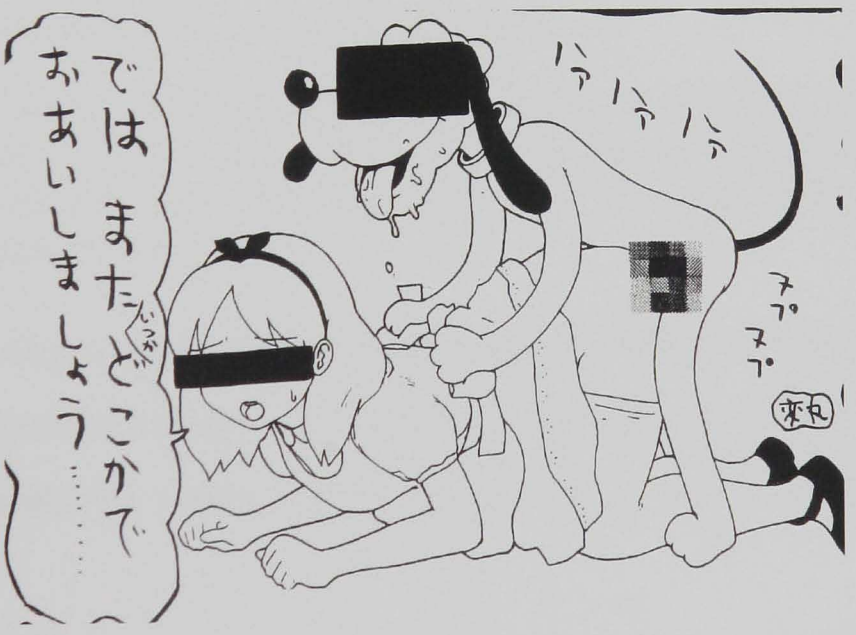
While cell animation technique originated in America, Japanese *anime* is distinct from American animation. On the surface Japanese animation might appear similar to Disney, Morikawa argues Disney has the complete removal of sex and violence, and represents purity popularized. (Morikawa 2003, 101) Using examples such as *Snow White* and *Cinderella*, Morikawa argues that in Disney there is no sex or violence, compared to the original European fairytales, which were full of cruelty. This reflects Disney's puritan protestant religious morality, and a certain set of values. Morikawa argues that Disney acts like a filter for European fairy tales, and points out that in Japan Grimm's fairytales for example, are very popular. (Morikawa 2003)

After defeat in World War II Japan was in a state of devastation, and extreme poverty, and completely unlike the world of Disney, and yet Tezuka Osamu, who was heavily influenced by Disney, was extremely popular. The background is Japan in poverty, reclaiming a wasteland. There is the notion of the invented communal or personal reality that functions as an avenue of escape from contemporary social circumstances, but Morikawa points out, there are no Disney *otaku*. (Morikawa 2003, 101) For a long time after the war, with Disney, sex and violence were removed from *manga*; the image of the child was purified. *Rorikon* is a kind of recovery of that sex and violence. (Azuma 2003) Beautiful half naked fighting girls, represent sex and violence, and causes great reaction in Europe and Asia, and lead to the creation of the terms *anime* or *Japanimation*.

Azuma questions whether in fact Tezuka Osamu signals the start of *rorikon*, since he introduces sex and death and violence to the cute style of Disney. Humanism is important, he argues, Tezuka's *manga* are philosophical, full of eroticism, the grotesque and cruel violence. While '*eroguro*' was around before Tezuka, it was already a feature of *manga*, what is noticeable about Tezuka's *manga*, Morikawa argues is their unique eroticism, and cites the *manga Ayako* 1972-3, as an example. (Morikawa 2003, 109) The story is based around Ayako, the youngest daughter of the Tengai family, a large landowner in the Tôhoku region, was an illegitimate child born between Sakuemon, the head of the family, and Sue, the wife of the eldest son of Sakuemon. In 1949, when Ayako was four years old, Jiro, the second son of Sakuemon, was discharged from military service. When he was imprisoned by the enemy, he became a spy for CIC of the U.S. military, and assisted the murder of Eno Tadashi, who was the leader of Progressive Civilians Party and the lover of the eldest daughter of Sakuemon, Shiko. As Ayako witnessed him washing his shirt stained with blood after the murder, the Tengai family decides to shut young Ayako up in the storehouse forever for fear of their family name being disgraced. Eleven years later Ayako has her first menstruation in the storehouse, and has sex with her own brother by blood, Shiro, the third son of Sakuemon. It is a story which seems incongruous with Tezuka's cute Disney-like style in which it is drawn.

Morikawa argues just as Europe degenerated into America, so did America to Japan. 'Japanese *anime* imaging had its origins in America's Disney animation, a processed

4-40. Aida Makoto, 2003
Disney TM
From *mina to isho series*
Acrylic, water colour on paper
160 x 120 cm
Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo



4-41. Machino Henmaru, 1994
Yellow Missile
Manga no.46 February, p148
Tokyo: Izumi Comics

offshoot of a parent culture.' (Morikawa 2004, 23) Aida Makoto's depiction of *Mickey Mouse* (Ill.4-40) resonates with Machino Henmaru's take on Disney, his version of *Alice* for example. (Ill.4-41)

> Disney had established as a medium for impressionable children by purging them of all sexual elements,' [otaku culture] inject them with sex appeal. The result was the *bishôjo* figure so ubiquitous to Japanese *anime*.
> (Morikawa 2004, 26)

The hierarchical relationship of the US and Japan is the background. Injecting sex and violence into Disney represents a recoil from Americanisation, and a parody of American hegemony. (Morikawa 2003, 106)

The importance of the 1980s is a crucial factor in terms of the relationship with America. In the 1970s comparisons with America had begun slowly to disappear, due to Japan's economic expansion. Then in the 1980s self confidence grew, and Japan entered the 'bubble' era.

> At this time we started to question whether we had a culture of our own. As it became apparent that there was no 'real' Japanese culture that vacuum came to its head and even [became] unbearable, since people cannot live in this state. There was no escape because Japan was to[o] powerful at this moment to regress. This is when Japan's relations to the States gained a new dimension and everything turned upside down. (Sawaragi quoted in Woznicki 2001, n.p.)

At that point, Azuma argues, people decided not to go on comparing themselves with the West, but to create something that was originally Japanese.

> However, we had to realize that it wasn't possible to bring out something originally Japanese. It wasn't in us to begin with, since we had been born after WWII and raised in a society that was completely based on American culture. (Sawaragi quoted in Woznicki 2001, n.p.)

This 'realisation' has been an important consideration for contemporary artists, as has been previously discussed with reference to Murakami's character *Mr. DOB* in chapter 2. But it is in Aida Makoto's works that Japan's relationship with America is most explicitly played out.

Aida's manga *Mutant Hanako* 1997, blends pornography, violence and absurdity, and anti-American fantasy, is drawn in a rough, doodling style reminiscent of Nemoto Takashi in the magazine *Garo*. *Garo* was first published in 1964 to carry the *manga Kamui den* (Tales of Kamui) by Shirato Sanpei. *Garo* tried to discover newcomers and experimental *manga*

and became more uncommercial and more anti-establistment. *Garo* was especially aligned with students and underground *manga* artists.

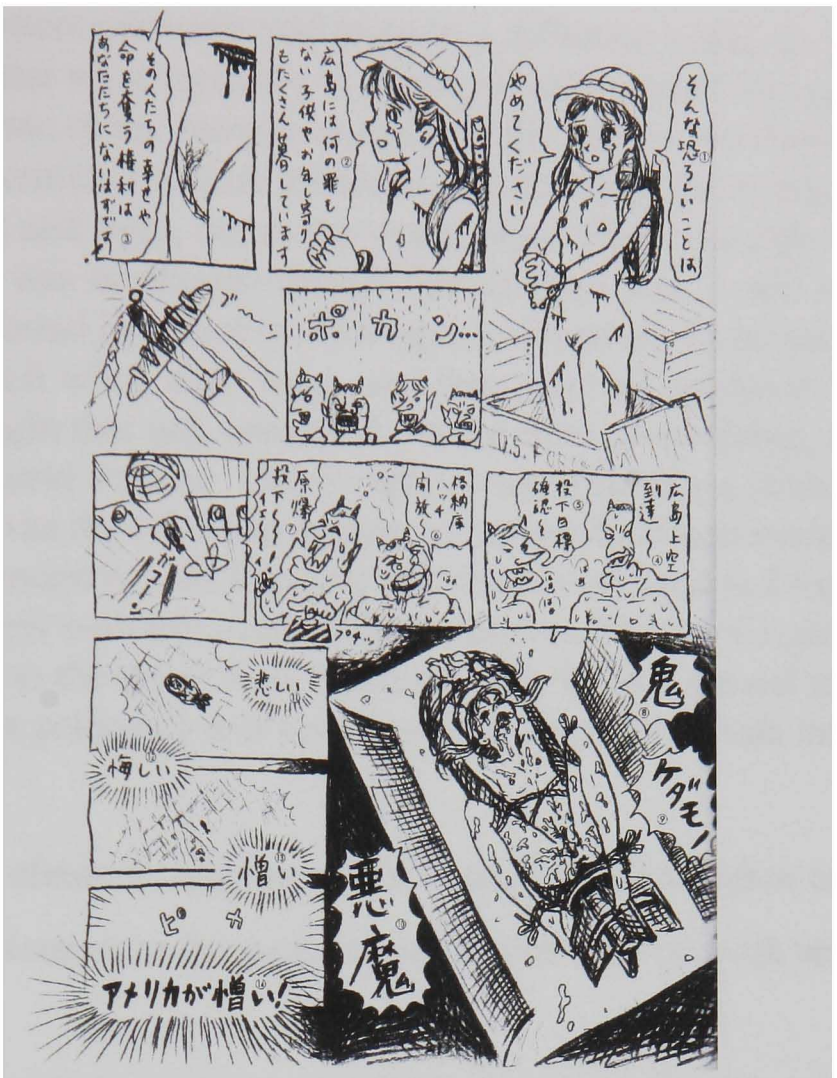
Mutant Hanako has its setting in Japan toward the end of the World War II. Hanako, a beautiful, gentle girl in Okinawa, often has dreams of the Emperor giving her a divine message telling her she is the chosen one to save Japan. Hanako's elder sister is raped and killed by barbaric American soldiers. Hanako herself becomes a hostage and slave of General MacArthur, who had a Lolita complex and was capable of exercising evil supernatural power. Hanako managed to escape the evil hands of MacArthur but mistakenly went aboard the Enola Gay bomber and, after being raped, was dropped onto Hiroshima with the atomic bomb. The illustration shows Hanako strapped to the atomic bomb dropped from the Enola Gay. (Ill.4-42) Similarities with this image are evident within *manga*. Machino Henmaru's *Yellow Missile* for example. (Ill.4-43) Being exposed to strong radioactivity, she was reborn with supernatural power. She was now determined to take revenge. Hanako was now able to fly and prevent the atomic bomb from dropping on Nagasaki. As thousands of violent American soldiers landed on mainland Japan, Hanako fought against them with a bamboo spear that emitted destructive beams, and swept them away. Hanako went to the final battle against immortal monster Roosevelt in space. After a violent fight, Hanako, with the help of the awakened spirits of war heroes, finally defeated Roosevelt and destroyed America. In the end, with her power completely exhausted, Hanako died tranquilly in the Emperor's arms.

Some art critics have claimed Aida's works are right wing, and Matsui Midori has commented on this.

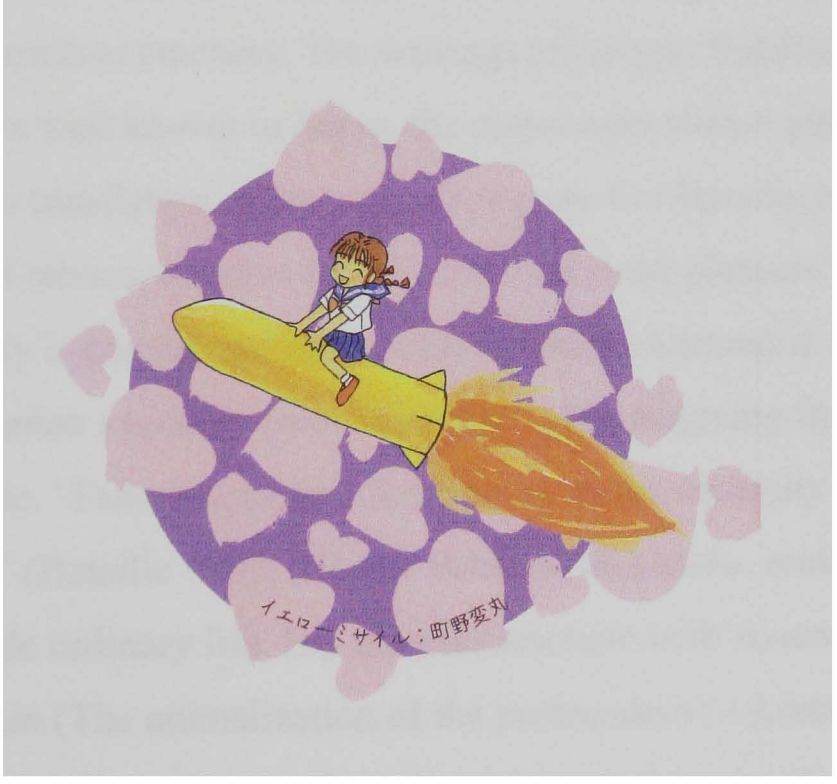
> *Mutant Hanako* is not entirely free of right-wing ideology. In spite of its deliberate infantilism, it conveys Aida's nostalgia for the romanticism attached to the eternal Japanese female and his desire to intervene in the course of Japanese history dominated by American production and consumer principles. This mixture of an oppositional critique of social conformity and a right-wing fantasy is a unique property of Japanese anti-modern imagination. (Matsui 2002, 157)

When I asked Aida directly about this he responded that he is actually left wing, and went on to explain the use of right wing imagery.

> [B]efore my debut, while I was a student, among cultured people, especially in contemporary art, it was a big prerequisite to be left leaning to start with. There was a



4-42. Aida Makoto, 1999
Mutant Hanako p21



4-43. Machino Henmaru, 1994
Yellow Missile
Manga back cover no.46
Tokyo: Izumi Comics

> climate that those who were not were told to go to a different world. In newspapers and public opinions, some were sarcastic to *Asahi shinbun* (*Asahi Newspaper*) or taking positions like those of the *Bungei shunjû* and the *Sankei shinbun* (*Sankei Newspaper*) [similarly critical to *Asahi shinbun*] and therefore there was a [balanced] opposition between left and right, but in the world of art there was only the *Asahi shinbun* position, there was no *Bungei shunjû* side. If there was, it was not in contemporary art, but found in *Nitten* or *Nihonga*. In literature there were Ôe Kenzaburô, Mishima, left wing, right wing, and they were all accepted. But in fine art, only the left, I thought that was unnatural. At the time of my debut, I wanted to give the Japanese art world a shock. The complex way of thinking of the son of a left winger. In addition, it was the rebellion against an art world which excludes the right wing. However, more recently I am thinking that there's no need to From now on it is unlikely that I will deal with ultra-nationalistic themes. Plenty of right-wing type of things have come in to the art as well. More recently there's almost too much of them. I am thinking that perhaps I don't need to do it anymore. (Aida interview 2004)

Aida introduces a poisonous element, and just as the *otaku* subculture often creates outrage, Aida brings a controversial element to the world of art.do this type of work any more.

In the West cuteness mixed with the erotic is often linked with paedophilia and as a taboo it is very much removed from the public eye. In Japan this is more out in the open, and sex with young children, while still obviously a taboo as such, is often depicted with a lighter, happier side, wrapped in a harmless cuteness. The writings of George Bataille are worthy of consideration because he is well known in Japan, the major mainstream publisher Kôdansha having published a translation of his work *Eroticism*. For Bataille eroticism is precisely the transgression of taboos, the pleasure of eroticism is the pleasure of breaking a taboo. In fact human sexuality is constituted by the taboos which surround it. (Bataille 1962) Eroticism separates human sexuality from animal sex, taboos giving fresh impetus to the irresistible animal impulse. 'Taboos appeared in response to the necessity of banishing violence from everyday life.' (Bataille 1962, 55) For Bataille, like *otaku*, eroticism is a secret solitary activity, outside ordinary life. His theories resonate with Azuma's text *Dôbutsuka suru posuto-modan* (The animalization of the postmodern). (Azuma 2001b) 'The whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self contained character of the participators as they are in their normal lives.' (Bataille 1962, 17)

The concept of a transcendence associated with sex and orgasm, found in Bataille, is often depicted in *manga*. (Ill.4-44) This illustration depicts a scene showing a couple having

4-44. *Nyan nyan* (meow meow), May 2002
Manga page
Comic Karuten

lesbian sex, with one girl turning into a simplified *Miffy*-like version of herself. Humans become *manga* characters, *manga* characters become Dick Bruna characters, in a simplification symbolising a loss of the complexities of the human.

Aida Makoto referred to Bataille in my interview with him, particularly his work *The Accursed Share*.

> Indeed, part of the reason of why I did erotic type art was to keep in mind the eroticism which was written up in Shibusawa's book. As for Bataille, I have at times intended to read Shibusawa's translation, but as I have never yet read it properly, I don't really know much about it. However, I do know Georges Bataille which came via Shibusawa. I am thinking that he must be an interesting person somehow, but I am not knowledgeable about him. At the beginning of Georges Bataille's book entitled 'Accursed Share', there's a theory that because the sun's energy is coming to the earth in excess, what is important for people to do is to squander, i.e., to waste money and that working is not important. I forgot if I read that directly or if I read it in Shibusawa's books, but I remember that I experienced it as a revelation in my youth. (Aida interview 2004)

Georges Bataille's work *The Accursed Share*, which was originally published as *La Part Maudite* in 1967, is Bataille's book of 'political economy', the first volume of which deals with consumption, and the 'excess of energy'.

In his essay 'The Ecstasy of Communication' Baudrillard also refers to Bataille's notion of 'the accursed share' as something that remains outside of society's rationalised economy of exchanges, as a kind of symbolic exchange. (Baudrillard 1983b, 126) Bataille's theory of the 'accursed share' is brought up with reference to Murakami by Matsui, who states that Murakami's works,

> reflect on such aspects of geek culture that make it an embodiment of 'abjection', or 'the accursed share' of modern culture that resists sublimation into the domain of meaning. DOB, a cartoon figure created by Murakami, is his expression of *differance*. (Matsui 1996, 69)

Bataille highlights a need to study the system of human production and consumption within a much larger framework. (Bataille 1991, 20)

Conclusion

This chapter elaborated on Murakami's use of humorous parody, where 'quotation becomes a form of parody,' (Hutcheon 2000, 41) and which alludes to the importance of

parody for *otaku*, and the subversive potential parody. Aida Makoto similarly uses parody, while also referencing Hokusai's parody and the connection with *shunga*. This use of parody by these artists resonates with the importance of parody within postmodernism. 'Parody is usually considered central to postmodernism, both by its detractors and its defenders.' (Hutcheon 1989, 93) For Jameson postmodern representation is a simple imitation of imitation, and a 'cannibalization of all the styles of the past', without any critical or political claim. (Jameson 1991, 18) Parody is, Hutcheon argues, 'doubly coded in political terms: it both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies.' (Hutcheon 1989, 101) While postmodern parody 'may indeed be complicitous with the values it inscribes as well as subverts', the subversion is still there. (Hutcheon 1989, 106)

At the heart of this is the American origin of much of Japanese popular culture. There is again a relation to the defeat in World War II. Azuma speaks of a distortion of popular culture with the occupation by America and the twisted nature of *otaku* is due to this. Hutcheon refers to Kristeva's claim of 'a general postmodernist desire to establish a dialogue with the past' (Hutcheon 2000, 111), and states

> Parody is, then, an important way for modern artists to come to terms with the past – through ironic recoding or, in my awkward descriptive neologism, 'trans-contextualizing'. (Hutcheon 2000, 112)

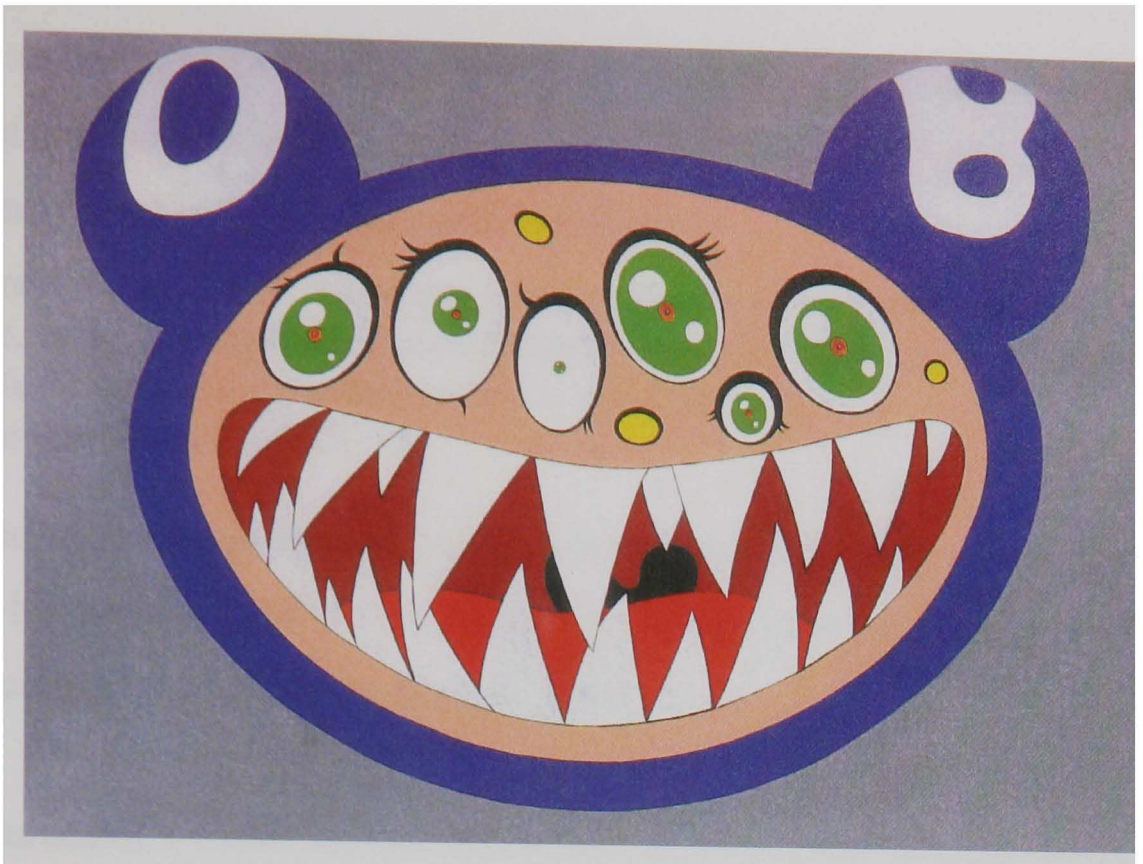
This 'Oedipal relation to his immediate past' does however provide 'the primary materials of future construction.' (Hutcheon 2000, 112) This Oedipal relation, which has already been touched upon in chapter 2, with Aida's statements regarding the lack of a 'father's dignity' in Japan, (Aida interview 2004) will be further explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 Transformation: monsters and the grotesque

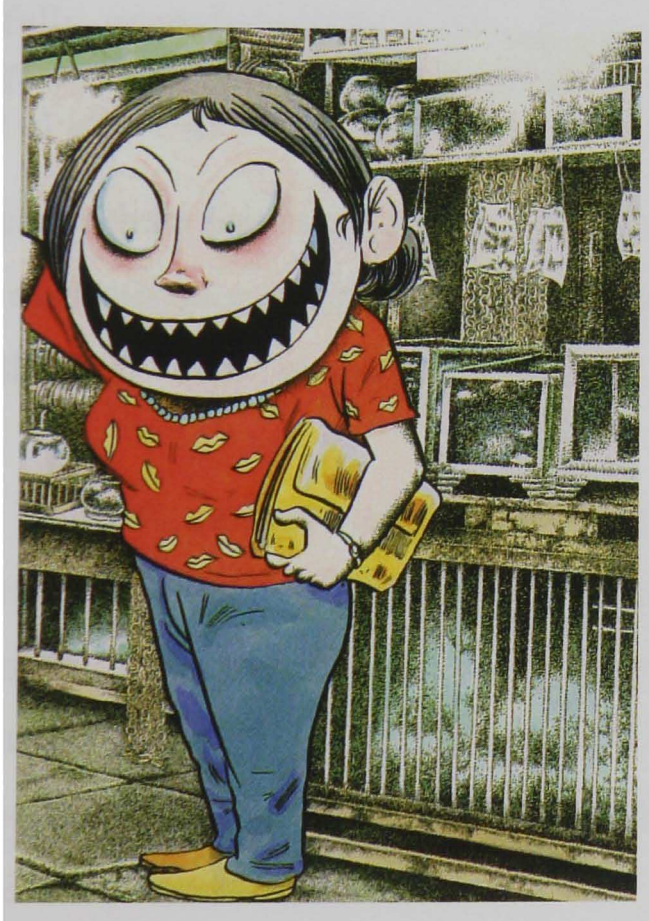
In Murakami Takashi's character *Mr. DOB* in *DOB's March* 1995 there has been a transformation from 'the childish, innocence of *Mr. DOB* representing "cuteness" to the demon-like *Mr. DOB* representing chaos.' (Minami 2001, 61) (Ill.5-1) In the painting *727* 1996 *Mr. DOB* resembles an ancient Japanese monster, and in the *Melting DOB* series in 1999 the cuteness of *Mr. DOB* again transforms into the grotesque, sprouting multiple eyes of various sizes and shapes, his trademark lettering warped, 'mutating into a jagged-toothed, unstable monster.' (Minami 2001, 69) *Manga* artist Mizuki Shigeru is a key influence, his illustration of *Kechisuke onna* 1992 (Ill.5-2) for example, and a link to the world of monsters in Japanese popular culture. 'Monster,' along with '*ero*' is one of the two key words that capture the meaning of 'Tokyo Pop,' according to Sawaragi in his essay 'What is Tokyo Pop?' and he compares Murakami's monsters to American monsters by artists such as Kenny Scharf. (Sawaragi 1999a, 70-78)

Nara Yoshitomo's work also often incorporates a horror element in his typically cute figures. (Ill.5-3) Children peer at the viewer through evil eyes, clutching a knife or saw in a final stand of insanity. They recall the twin girls standing in the bloody hotel hallway in Stanley Kubrick's film of Stephen King's novel *The Shining* 1980. (Joynes 1999, 106) Nara's tapping into horror through the medium of the innocent child is particularly poignant considering recent shockingly violent crimes in Japan involving children as the aggressors. Murakami also makes a connection with Steven Spielberg and has stated how much he has been influenced by him. 'In his films there is a tension between the children's world and the adult's world.' (Pagel 2001, n.p.) For Murakami a key issue is the 'grotesque' in *otaku* subculture, evident in his exhibition 'Takashi Murakami: summon monsters? open the door? heal? or die?' at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo in 2001, for example. (Murakami 2000b, 23)

The transformation from cute character to monster, the switching between cuteness and the grotesque can be compared to a schizophrenia associated with postmodernism. Jameson links schizophrenia to postmodernism in his essay 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', and argues that contemporary capitalism has extended the symptoms of schizophrenia to the masses in the form of postmodern culture; both postmodernism and



5-1. Murakami Takashi, 1995
Dob's March
Acrylic on canvas
70 x 100 cm
From Murakami 1996, 14



5-2. Mizuki Shigeru, 1992
Kechisuke onna
From Mizuki Shigeru *Yôkai Gadan* (Monster Encyclopaedia), p82-3
Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten

schizophrenia as 'cultural forces that scramble and confuse.' (Jameson 1985, 111-125) Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*: *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* 1983 is another key analysis of schizophrenia and capitalism.

> Is it correct to say that in this sense schizophrenia is the product of the capitalist machine, as manic-depression and paranoia are the product of the despotic machine, and hysteria the product of the territorial machine?
> (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 33)

This is a period of schizophrenia, not so much schizophrenics in any clinical sense, as Jameson puts it (Jameson 1991, 26), but schizophrenia considered as a process; a mapping of the social, cultural, and aesthetic. (Peretti 1996)

In many of Murakami's works the colours become powerful and overwhelmingly vivid, there is a sense of saturation which resonates with Jameson's description of the schizophrenic experience of 'unreality', which becomes 'ever more vivid in sensory ways, whether the new experience is attractive or terrifying.' (Jameson 1983, 120)

> [A]s temporal continuities break down, the experience of the present becomes powerfully, overwhelmingly vivid and 'material': the world comes before the schizophrenic with heightened intensity, bearing a mysterious and oppressive charge of affect, glowing with hallucinatory energy. (Jameson 1985, 120)

Jameson associates these attributes of schizophrenia, 'an experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence,' with postmodernism and late capitalism. (Jameson 1985, 119)

On December 16, 1997, during an episode of the television *anime Pokemon* shown in Japan, when a bomb was thrown at the monster *Pikachu*, who responded with his ability to shoot lightening bolts, the combination was just at the wrong rate of strobbing, animated flashes interacted with frenetically changing colours as *Pikachu* blinked out lightning bolts across the screen, inducing epileptic seizures in about seven hundred children who were watching the show. (Drazen 2003)

In many respects the media culture of the late 20th century simulates schizoid experience. Victor Burgin, for example, describes the 'rhythm' of consumer capitalism, which is defined by what he terms the 'flickering' images of the mass media. (Peretti 1996) The rapid-fire succession of signifiers in *MTV* style media, or quickly changing television channels with a remote control, erodes the viewer's sense of temporal continuity and

5-3. Nara Yoshitomo, 1994
Dead Flower
Acrylic on Cotton
100 x 100 cm
From Rothenburger (ed.) 2001, 27

providing a postmodern alternative to the psychoanalytic model of multiple subject positions.

For Jameson the schizophrenic confusion destroys the possibility of critical perspectives, as postmodern schizophrenic culture 'replicates, reproduces, and reinforces' the logic of consumer capitalism. (Jameson 1991, 125)

> [A] coexistence not even of multiple and alternate worlds so much as of unrelated fuzzy sets and semiautonomous subsystems whose overlap is perceptually maintained like hallucinogenic depth planes in a space of many dimensions is, of course, what is replicated by the rhetoric of decentring (and what informs official rhetorical and philosophical attacks on 'totality'). (Jameson 1991, 372)

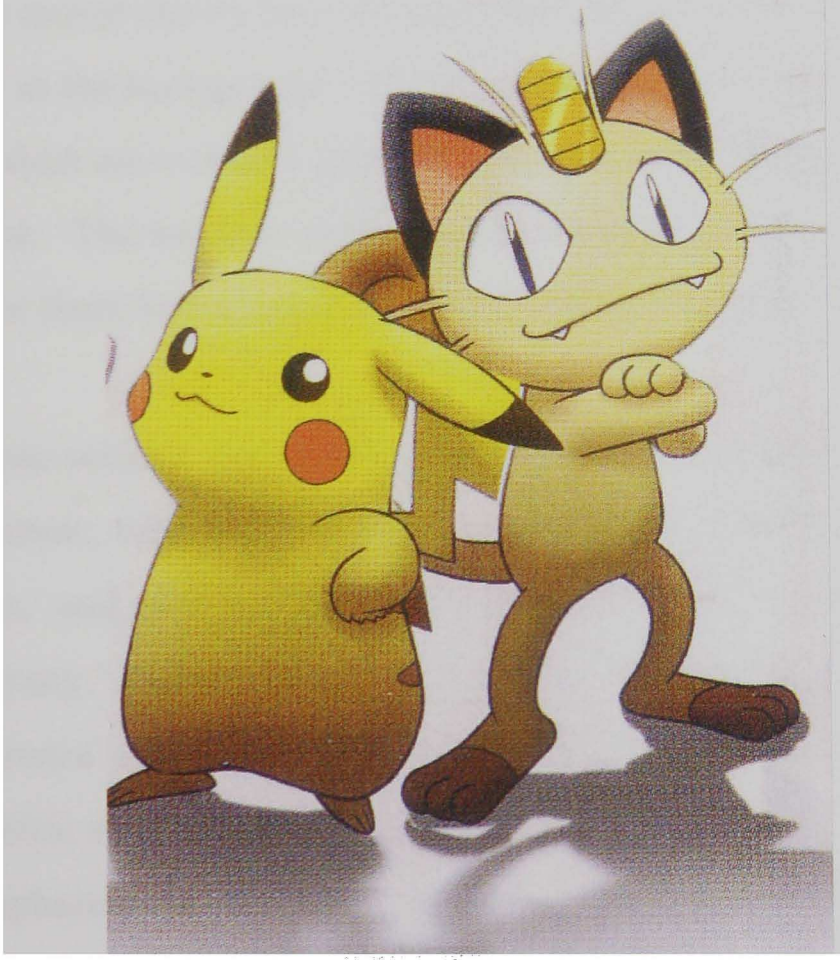
The question is whether there is also a way in which it resists that logic. Murakami replicates consumerism, pushing it to its extremes, in a way which resonates with a critical stance put forward by Baudrillard previously discussed in chapter 3. Deleuze and Guattari do in fact identify schizophrenia as having great revolutionary potential, and a central part of a subversive postmodern politics. Rather than fragmentation, which implies a break-up of the old order, it represents an emergence of the multiple in new and unexpected ways. By looking at the artists' works and statements, the aim of this chapter is to examine how contemporary artists Murakami and Nara reflect on this aspect of postmodernism, and how the transformation of cuteness into monster images might offer up a critical position.

Postmodern Schizophrenia

Murakami's characters *Kaikai* and *Kiki* display a cuteness with the potential to transform into a monster. In Japanese, a similar word, the adjective *kikikaikai*, describes strange things or phenomena, things that are frightening, disturbing or make us uneasy. *Kikikaikai* is used to 'describe the atmosphere whenever ghouls or spirits appear.' (Murakami 2001a, 134) In *Nirvana* 2001, Murakami 'traces a wonderful transmogrification from the decidedly more aggressive *Kiki* to the sweet *Kaikai*.' (Minami 2001, 70) In the work *In Peach Paradise* 2002, (Ill.5-4) it is possible to see in Murakami's characters a resemblance to monsters from the digital game and television *anime Pokemon*. (Ill.5-5)

In *Pokemon* the lead human character is called Satoshi, named after its creator, Tajiri Satoshi, who as a young outcast living just outside Tokyo, collected insects, especially

5-4. Murakami Takashi, 2002
Kaikaikiki in Peach Paradise (detail)
Acrylic on canvas mounted on board
160 x 350 x 5cm
Galerie Emmanuel Perotin, Paris



5-5. *Pokemon*, 2003
Pikachu and *Niâsu*
Promotional flier
Nintendo

beetles and other tiny creatures in the fields, ponds and forest near where he lived. In 1991 Nintendo introduced a cable that could link two Game Boys, and by 1996 Tajiri had developed *Pocket Monsters*. (Drazen 2003) 'I imagined an insect moving back and forth across the cable. That's what inspired me.' (Tajiri quoted in Chua-Eoan and Larimer 1999, 80) Howard Chua-Eoan and Tim Larimer place Tajiri as an *otaku*, and argue it is his obsessions, 'more dysfunctional than Disneyesque', that are at the core of the *Pokemon* phenomenon. (Chua-Eoan and Larimer 1999, 80-93) Tajiri, interviewed for their article 'Pokemania' in *Time* magazine states, 'the important thing was that the monsters had to be small and controllable. They came in a capsule, like a monster within yourself, like fear or anger.' (Tajiri quoted in Chua-Eoan and Larimer 1999, 89)

With some fellow *otaku*, including Sugimori Ken, who would eventually draw all the monsters for *Pokemon*, Tajiri had started a magazine called *GameFreak* in 1982, to publicize tips and cheat codes of their favourite games. 'Monsters make for disquieting playmates. No matter how toy-like and frivolous they may appear, monsters are unnatural and, in the end, deal in unresolved fear.' (Chua-Eoan and Larimer 1999) A flier for a *Pokemon* movie shows both the cute versions of the little monsters, but also huge terrifying monsters in the background. (Ill.5-6) Chua-Eoan and Larimer put forward the argument that monsters are a child's predilections, and quote child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim who wrote: 'The monster a child knows best and is most concerned with [is] the monster he feels or fears himself to be.' (Chua-Eoan and Larimer 1999, 89)

In Japanese society, potentially *otaku* might embody Deleuze and Guattari's vision of the schizophrenic, with the ability to 'escape coding, scramble the codes, and flee in all directions,' and as a '*subject-group*, whose libidinal investments are themselves revolutionary.' (Seem 1983, xxi) Significantly Deleuze and Guattari highlight the schizophrenic's resistance to being oedipalized, and a refusal, or breakdown of phallocentric meaning. Mark Seem's introduction to *Anti-Oedipus*, refers to their concept of schizophrenics as '*orphans*', (Seem 1983, xxi) while John Whittier Treat also speaks of a 'fatherlessness' in contemporary Japanese society. (Treat 1995, 297) This could perhaps be taken literally to refer to the absence of fathers in the post-war family makeup in Japan, through either death in the war, or hard work and over time in the post-war rebuilding period, or more symbolically to the fall of the emperor, or the relation with America as an

5-6. *Pokemon*, 2003
Pocket Monsters Advanced Generation Pikachu the Movie promotional flier
Nintendo

5-7. Mizuki Shigeru, 1966
Gegege no kitarô
Manga cover vol.4 '*Yôkai Kemono*'
Tokyo: Kadokawa

occupying force. *Anti-Oedipus* represents Deleuze and Guattari's attack on psychoanalysis, and belief in Freud's Oedipus complex that they argue leads to a herd instinct, and a desire to be led. The possibility exists then that in Murakami's transforming *Mr. DOB* works, their schizophrenic appearance allude to an anti modernist critique.

The first and central rule of *Pokemon* is to accumulate. Collecting cards, plastic monster figures and digital monsters by trading between handheld electronic games. *Pokemon* is about making collections and cataloguing a collection of monsters, the more *Pokemon* you have, the greater power you possess. Tajiri had designed a secret twist into the programming. While officially there were only one hundred and fifty species of *Pokemon*, Tajiri had put a 151st in the software, called *Mew*, a major character in the animated film. The rumours started flying of a secret monster that only a few people had the key to unlock. 'You had to acquire Mew by interacting,' says Tajiri. 'Without trading, you can never get Mew.' (Tajiri quoted in Chua-Eoan and Larimer 1999, 90) A child's ability to master the cunning required to accumulate such trading power, the ease with which they slip into ruthlessness, has shocked parents, who aren't ready for their little innocents to be so precociously cutthroat. In America, where *Pokemon* are also hugely successful, a nine-year-old boy on New York's Long Island stabbed an older schoolmate in a dispute over cards. A group of parents in New Jersey has sued the trading-card manufacturer for intentionally making some cards scarce to force children into buying more and more packs of *Pokemon* cards. (Chua-Eoan and Larimer 1999, 83) The success of the video game lead to the television series *Pokemon*, animated by Shôgakukan. The show quickly became the top-rated children's *anime* series in Japan, appealing to both girls and boys. Many *anime* followed *Pokemon*'s premise, aimed at a different age groups, such as *Digimon*, *Yûgiô* and *Cardcaptor Sakura*.

In April 2001 Murakami changed the name of his Hiropon Factory to Kaikaikiki Incorporated, a company which now included forty staff in Japan, and a manager in the New York studio, in a move perhaps reflecting and commenting on the mass marketing and merchandising epitomized by *Pokemon*, which was also becoming more global. 'Its main objective now is not so much to think collectively about Pop Art as to create 'art products.' (Murakami quoted in Kelmachter 2002, 93) The change to Kaikaikiki Inc. also reflects the acceleration of a visual culture, which produces subjects that approach a schizophrenic state.

Whereas Jameson is concerned that postmodernism and schizophrenia reinforce, instead of resist, consumer capitalism, Deleuze and Guattari claim that schizophrenia is the '*absolute* limit', the '*exterior* limit of capitalism itself or the conclusion of its deepest tendency.' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 246)) For Deleuze and Guattari, it is the nature of capitalism to encourage desires even as it works to restrict them, and stress that it is the schizophrenic process which has the potential to disrupt this.

> The schizo is not revolutionary, but the schizophrenic process – in terms of which the schizo is merely the interruption, or the continuation in the void – is the potential for revolution (Deleuze and Guattari, 341)

Murakami's schizophrenic representations invokes this revolutionary potential as they attempt to take on a potentially critical position of accelerating late capitalism to this outer limit.

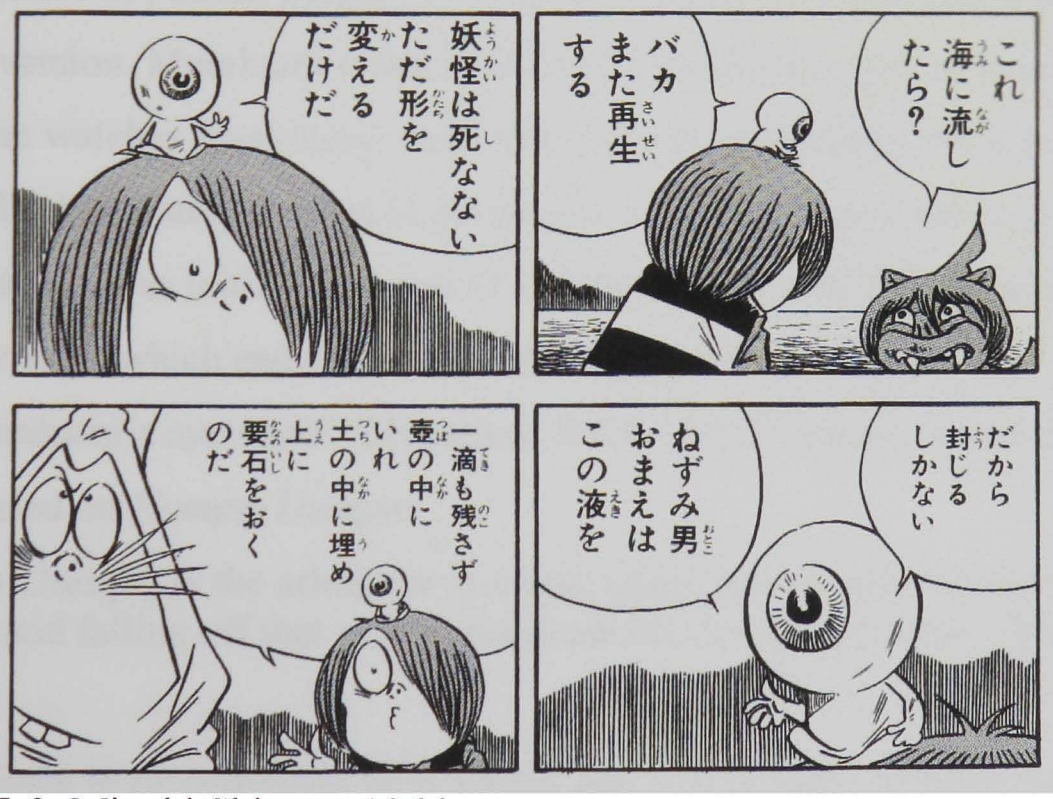
Kaikaikiki is a term that was used by art historian Tsuji Nobuo in his book *Kisô no keifu* (Tsuji 1988), meaning 'supernatural' and 'bizarre', which people used at the time to describe the works of the Momoyama period (late 16th century) painter Kanô Eitoku. (Murakami 2001a, 134) This phrase also has a baby-like sound, which recalls Jameson's point that 'schizophrenia emerges from the failure of the infant to accede fully into the realm of speech and language.' (Jameson 1985, 118)

> As meaning is lost, the materiality of words becomes obsessive, as is the case when children repeat a word over and over again until its sense is lost and it becomes an incomprehensible incantation. (Jameson 1983, 120)

Returning to popular culture, in a similar way, the '*gegege*' from the title of Mizuki Shigeru's *manga GeGeGe no Kitarô* which was first published in 1966, refers to the sound a person makes when they are shivering with fear. (Ill.5-7)

GeGeGe no Kitarô was made into an animated television series a year after it was released as a *manga*, which continued on Japanese television up until 1997. In the *manga* Kitarô has very specific talents, his hair can be used as an indicator of other monsters in the area, or can be shot out as needle-type missiles when attacked by ghosts; his striped vest can be used to deflect or absorb magic or attacks. Kitarô's companions are a compelling combination of the gentle and fearsome. *Neko Musume*, a cute cat girl who turns into a

5-8. Murakami Takashi, 2000
Genki Ball
Acrylic on canvas
120 x 120 cm
Collection Brondesbury Holdings Ltd



5-9. Mizuki Shigeru, 1966
Gegege no kitarô
Manga vol.4 '*Yôkai Kemono*' p340
Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten

frightening display of teeth and claws when irritated or threatened, for example, and *Ittan Momen*, a creature who looks like a flying sheet (actually a *fundoshi*, a traditional Japanese underwear cloth), who allows Kitarô and his friends to fly on his back to their various destinations. Many of Mizuki's monsters are based on real monsters from Japanese history such as *Konaki Jiji*, who cries like a baby until he's picked up, at which point he turns into stone.

Murakami acknowledges the influence of Mizuki.

> He created a character called *Hyakume* (Hundred Eyes) who was a monster, and as his name indicates, had eyes all over his body. I liked it very much. A confectionary store near my home sold cardboard two-dimensional figures of *Hyakume* for five yen. The eyes on the figure were done in phosphorescent paint. In the evening, when we came home from the public bath, we could see these eyes shining in the darkness. It was as if the figure was there to say, 'welcome back'. (Murakami quoted in Kelmachter 2002, 81)

In *Genki Ball* 2000 (Ill.5-8) *Oval kun* (Mr. Oval) resembles Mizuki's character, *Medama Oyaji*. (Ill.5-9) (Takizawa in Murakami, Hiroki & Takizawa 2000, 27-29) *Medama Oyaji*, who is Kitarô's father, resembles an eyeball on a tiny body, with little arms and legs, and often sits in Kitarô's one empty eye socket.

While the influence of Mizuki Shigeru is clear, Murakami has created his own contemporary version. Murakami's character *Oval kun* features eyes all over his body, 'showing that he watches everything, without caring about anything. He is my original character, a willful misinterpretation of his inspiration.' (Murakami 2001a, 134) The creation of *Oval kun* was initially a result of a collaboration with Takizawa Naoki director at *Issey Miyake Men*, which ended in a line of clothing and accessories covered in Murakami's eye motif. (Murakami 2001, 136) Murakami states that *Oval kun* was actually based on *Humpty Dumpty*.

> Humpty Dumpty is the arbitrator in a war, sitting atop a wall between two warring nations and falling off that wall to his death the day the war ends. (Murakami 2001a, 134)

Oval kun was made to be combined with *Kaikai* and *Kiki* to make a traditional Buddhist three-image composition. (Murakami 2002, 5)

Mizuki Shigeru is regarded as an expert on monsters; he attempted to collect them all into his *Yôkai Gadan* (Monster Encyclopaedia) 1992. Sakaiminato City, Mizuki's birthplace in Tottori prefecture has held the annual *Sekai Yôkai Kaigi* (The World Ghosts & Monsters

Conference) since 1996. Mizuki was influenced by the 18th century artist and scholar Toriyama Sekien, who in the 1780s began an exhaustive study of ghosts and ghouls in which he attempted to create a full list of all known types in Japan. He produced what could be called an encyclopaedia of monsters in Japan. The first volume appeared in 1781 under the title of *The Hundred Demons' Night Parade*. Toriyama produced *Gazu Hyakki Tsurezure Bukuro* (*The Illustrated Collection of One Hundred Random Ghosts*) three years later, and completed two further volumes in the years that followed, ultimately compiling what remains the most definitive list. Many of Mizuki's illustrations, are taken directly from Toriyama's books. His image of *Burabura*, (Ill.5-10) for example, which is based on Toriyama's *Burabura* 1784. (Ill.5-11) Edo Period *ukiyo-e*, particularly Utagawa Kuniyoshi's woodblock prints featuring ghosts, are another influence on Mizuki. Utagawa Kuniyoshi's *Snake Mountain* and Shunkôsai Hokuei's *The Lantern Ghost of Oiwa* 1830s, represent 19th century woodblock print versions of the same *Burabura* image, an image which was also famously represented by Hokusai.

Japanese monsters and ghosts are essentially transformations. The Japanese word *'obake'* often refers to any type of preternatural being, comprising of *yôkai* and *yûrei* (ghost). *Yôkai*, literally 'bewitching apparition', usually means monster but encompasses a wide spectrum of ghouls, goblins and spirits, some frightening, some amusing, and many bizarre, anything that is weird or grotesque. *Obake*, the Japanese word for 'ghost', comes from *bakeru*, the verb meaning 'undergo change'. (Screech 1994, 14) *Bakemono*, literally, 'transforming thing', are one sort of thing that mutates into another, one phenomenon that experiences shift and alteration, one meaning that becomes unstuck and twisted into something else.

In my interview with Murakami, when asked about Mizuki, he referred to the effects of World War II.

> Mr. Mizuki is also about war. It's a mind escape from the anguish of war. There was too much adversity, by doing that kind of strange creature mindset, he escaped from there. Isn't that very interesting. In Japanese religion there is the *yaorozunokami* [eight million gods/spirits], isn't there. I think that is also escape from suffering. (Murakami interview 2004)

Here Murakami is referring to Mizuki's history. Mizuki was conscripted into the military

5-10. Toriyama Sekien, 1784
Burabura
From Toriyama 1992, 289

5-11. Mizuki Shigeru, 1992
Burabura
From Mizuki Shigeru *Yôkai Gadan* (Monster Encyclopaedia), p82-3
Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten

in 1943 and sent to the frontlines of Rabaul, Papua New Guinea, and has writen *manga* based on his war time experiences. (Ill.5-12) Most of his comrades died in an ambush by Australian troops, and Mizuki lost his left arm in a battle against U.S. forces. While fighting death and malaria Mizuki wandered to a nearby village and received food from local tribesmen, and as a result was later beaten repeatedly by his superiors. By the end of the war, he was one of only two men left in his unit.

The importance of these traumatic experiences is highlighted by Murakami.

> The after effect of defeat in World War II still keeps a big sense of trauma in the depths of our culture. The fact that we faced the end of the war by the dropping of atomic bombs is very symbolic and influential, not only for people who experienced the war but also for my generation who didn't. In a sense the Japanese have the principle of living only for the moment.
> (Murakami quoted in Kelmachter 2002, 101)

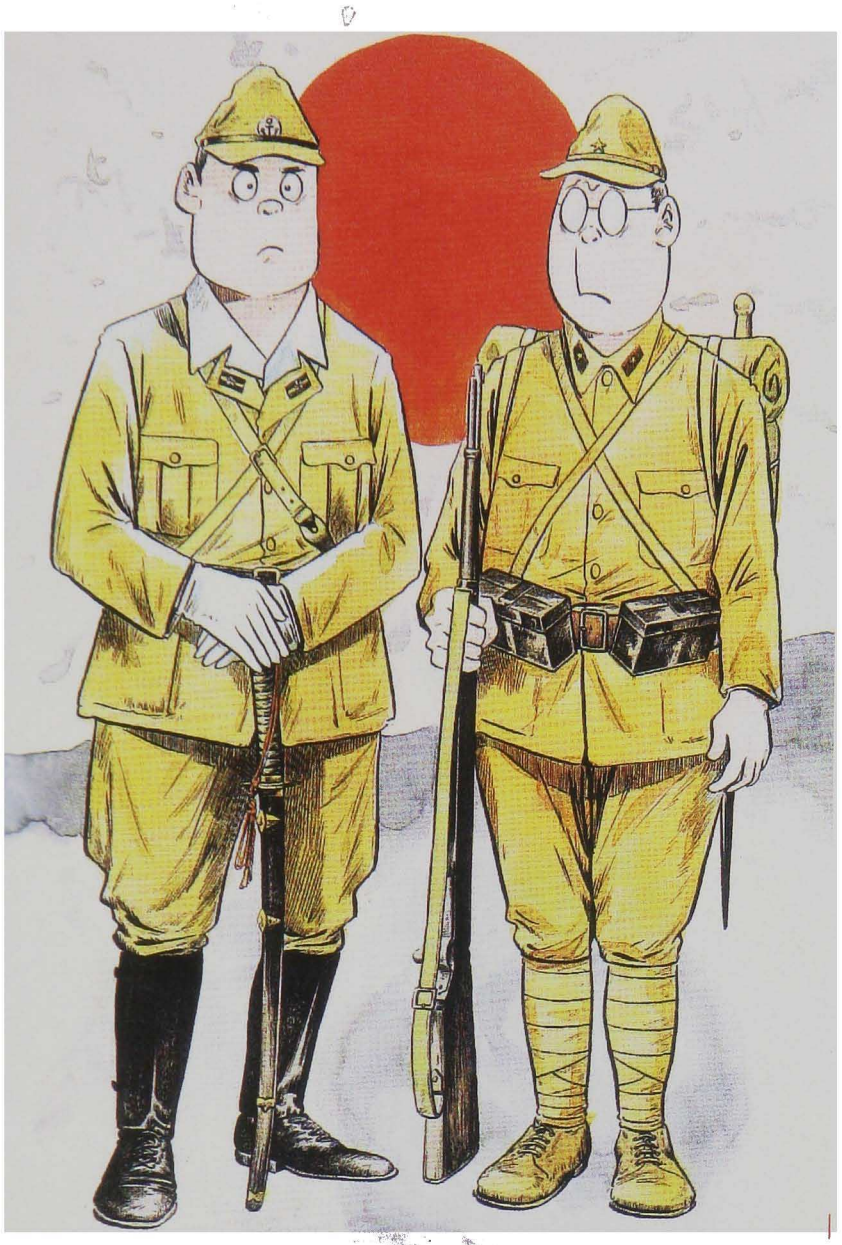
In Murakami's works it is possible to discover the horror and the trauma of World War II, and a cuteness that is at once a reaction and a comfort to it. In my interview with Mori Mariko she referred to the 'darkness' of post-war *manga*, which she linked to a 'post-war syndrome,' (Mori interview 2004) previously discussed in chapter 2.

Minami Yûsuke refers to *Godzilla* who appeared on the cinema screens 'a mere ten years after the end of the World War II, when the destruction of Tokyo was still fresh in peoples' minds,' (Minami 2001, 61) With television came a growing variety of monsters and aliens and more destruction of Japanese cities.

> Even though it was only fiction, Murakami who was born in 1962, and the rest of his generation in Japan were brought up with this weekly vision of daily life being destroyed by this absurd chaos. This image of science-fictional destruction and chaos and its dramaturgy, unfolding as it did under the nuclear umbrella of peace, became embedded in and all their basic vocabularies of thought. The lust for gratification through destroying and being destroyed leads to a stubborn repetition of crash and remix. Chaos overflows and only the excessive remains. (Minami 2001, 61)

This issue of cuteness and images of apocalypse will be further examined in chapter 7.

Traumatic memory can also be connected to multiple personality disorder, and schizophrenia. Nara Yoshitomo often includes a horror element in his work, his cute and vulnerable children transforming into little monsters. In *My Blackguard Angel* 2001, the



5-12. Mizuki Shigeru, 1995
Tobetoro tono 50 nen (50 years with *Tobetoro*)
From 'Oh! Mizuki Shigeru' 2004 (ex.cat.) Tokyo: Edo-Tokyo Museum, p30

5-13. Nara Yoshitomo, 2001
My Blackguard Angel
Acrylic on canvas
130 x 96.8 cm
From Yokohama Museum of Art 2001, 54

little girl, while having angel wings and cute bunny rabbit ears, also has a pair of fangs. (Ill.5-13) It is a painting that recalls an image of a little girl possessed by a ghost in *Urusei Yatsura*, the *manga* by Takahashi Rumiko started in 1989. (Ill.5-14) Brenda Jordan, in her essay for the catalogue of the exhibition 'Japanese Ghosts and Demons: Art of the Supernatural' 1985, refers to 'that part of our subconscious which does not respond to logic or reason, and which by virtue of its strange and unexplainable deeds is difficult to understand.' (Jordan 1985, 137) She makes a connection with Jung's psychological concept of the 'shadow.'

> The Shadow is like a second personality of which we are not normally aware and cannot actively control, but which forces itself upon us and others against our own better intentions...certain mischievous and sometimes evil elements of the human personality. (Jordan 1985, 137)

Urusei Yatsura is a comedy about a high school student Ataru, and Lum, a beautiful female *oni* (demon) with long, flowing, green-black hair, and scantily clad in a tiger-skin bikini (*oni* in Japanese folklore wear tiger skins). (Ill.5-15) Its mixing of genres, fragmentation, and blurring of fantasy and reality make *Urusei Yatsura* a 'perfect postmodern text'. (Napier 2000) where fragmentation represents a critical postmodern cartography; one that, as Lyotard suggests, does not seek to 'totalize them into a real unity', (Lyotard 1982, 125) and one which resonates with the multi perspective associated with schizophrenia.

Transformation into monsters is a recurring theme in *Urusei Yatsura*, Lum's fiancé Rei, for example, often changes into the *oni* version of himself. (Ill.5-16) *Oni* are 'demons' or 'ogres', ferocious creatures with horns and fangs that are known for performing some of the tortures that take place in the various Buddhist hells. Once a year in Japan, on February 3rd, there is an *oni* bashing ceremony, when beans, symbolizing wealth, are thrown outside of doorways and throughout the house to cries of '*Oni wa soto, fuku wa uchi*' (*Oni* out, good luck in). Julian Wolfgram argues historically 'for Japanese artists, *oni* became the means to depict not only malignant supernatural forces, but one side of the inherent nature of mankind as well.' (Wolfgram 1985, 91)

In Nara's sculpture *Light My Fire*, 2001, the little girl is holding a floating ball of fire, a *hitodama* (ghost fire). *Hitodama* is actually the roaming spirit of a dead person found haunting graveyards, and similar to two other *yôkai*, the *Onibi* and *Tengubi*, also floating

5-14. Takahashi Rumiko, 1989
Urusei Yatsura
Manga vol.1 p177
Shônen Sunday Comics
Tokyo: Shôgakukan

5-15. Takahashi Rumiko, 1989
Urusei Yatsura
Manga vol.1 p10
Shônen Sunday Comics
Tokyo: Shôgakukan

5-16. Takahashi Rumiko, 1989
Urusei Yatsura
Manga vol.1 p195
Shônen Sunday Comics
Tokyo: Shôgakukan

fireballs. A significant number of *obake* are explicitly related to fire, which is often an indication of strange forces, a face suddenly appearing and then disappearing in the flames of a bonfire, or a *hi no tama* (will-o'-the-wisp) lingering above harvested paddies.

Azuma argues that the 'super' in Murakami's concept Super Flat world is equivalent to the Japanese concept of *mukôgawa* (meaning the other side, or the beyond). (Murakami, Azuma & Takizawa 2000, 27-29) Without a certain degree of 'spirit', Azuma argues a cute marketing character would remain just a simple design, which would not induce love or affection, and therefore would not be effective in promoting sales or circulating money. We try to sense something in the character, something, he argues, similar to what Jacques Derrida calls the 'ghost'. (Murakami, Azuma & Takizawa 2000, 27-29) In Derrida's concept of 'ghost', the crucial importance of the 'ghost' is its status as a dead person returning, as a spirit that keeps coming back, the ghosts in Hamlet, the specter of Caesar, the specter of Marx even. (Derrida 1994) Ghosts are neither corporeal objects nor stern absences. As such, they stand in defiance of binary oppositions such as presence and absence, body and spirit, past and present, life and death. In the figure of the ghost, past and present cannot be neatly separated from one another, as any idea of the present is always constituted through the difference and deferral of the past, as well as anticipations of the future.

In another example Azuma also refers to computer desktop icons. One click on a character icon doesn't make it appear right away, after double clicking, the next layer appears. In this information chain eventually the character is 'selected', and this 'alerted' character now has a kind of spirit. (Murakami, Azuma & Takizawa 2000, 27-29) This resonates with Murakami's description of the Super Flat as being like the merging of layers in the creation of a computer desktop graphic, a feeling which conveys the blending of the high and low art in Japanese art. (Murakami 2000a, 5)

8 Million Pocket Monsters

Murakami links the profusion of characters in Japan with Shintô and the animist belief in spirits, the ancient concept of *yaoyorozunokami* (eight million gods/spirits). In my interview with Murakami he refers to the *yaoyorozunokami* in Japanese culture. (Murakami interview 2004) He also refers to this in his interview with Helene Kelmachter.

(Kelmachter 2002, 103) *Kami* (spirit/god) worship predates Shintô and Buddhism. The ancient Japanese text *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matters), written in 712 by Ono Yasumaro, retells the 'age of the gods', when it is said there were eight million *kami* (8 being a sacred number and can actually mean many or infinite). This huge variety included *kami* that resided in mountains, called *reizan* (sacred peaks), rivers and waterfalls. The monsters in *Pokemon* are often based on *kami*. *Pikachu* for example, is based on the *raijû* (lightning weasel), which looks like a large weasel with pointy hair. *Raijû* accompany the lightening of storms and typhoons, and enjoy eating navels. Because of this mothers in Japan warn their children to cover their navel whenever there is thunder and lighting, so the *raijû* don't eat it. In the *Pokemon* game *Pikachu* transforms into a true *raijû* if exposed to a 'lightning stone'. There are many episodes of *Pokemon* which include elements of Shintô, a fact highlighted by the strong Christian reaction against *Pokemon* provoked in America, where many of the most contentious parts were removed from the TV series before making the big screen version. (Clark 2000, 13)

There is a long tradition of monsters in Japan, and a number of scholars make the connection from pre-modern to the postmodern.

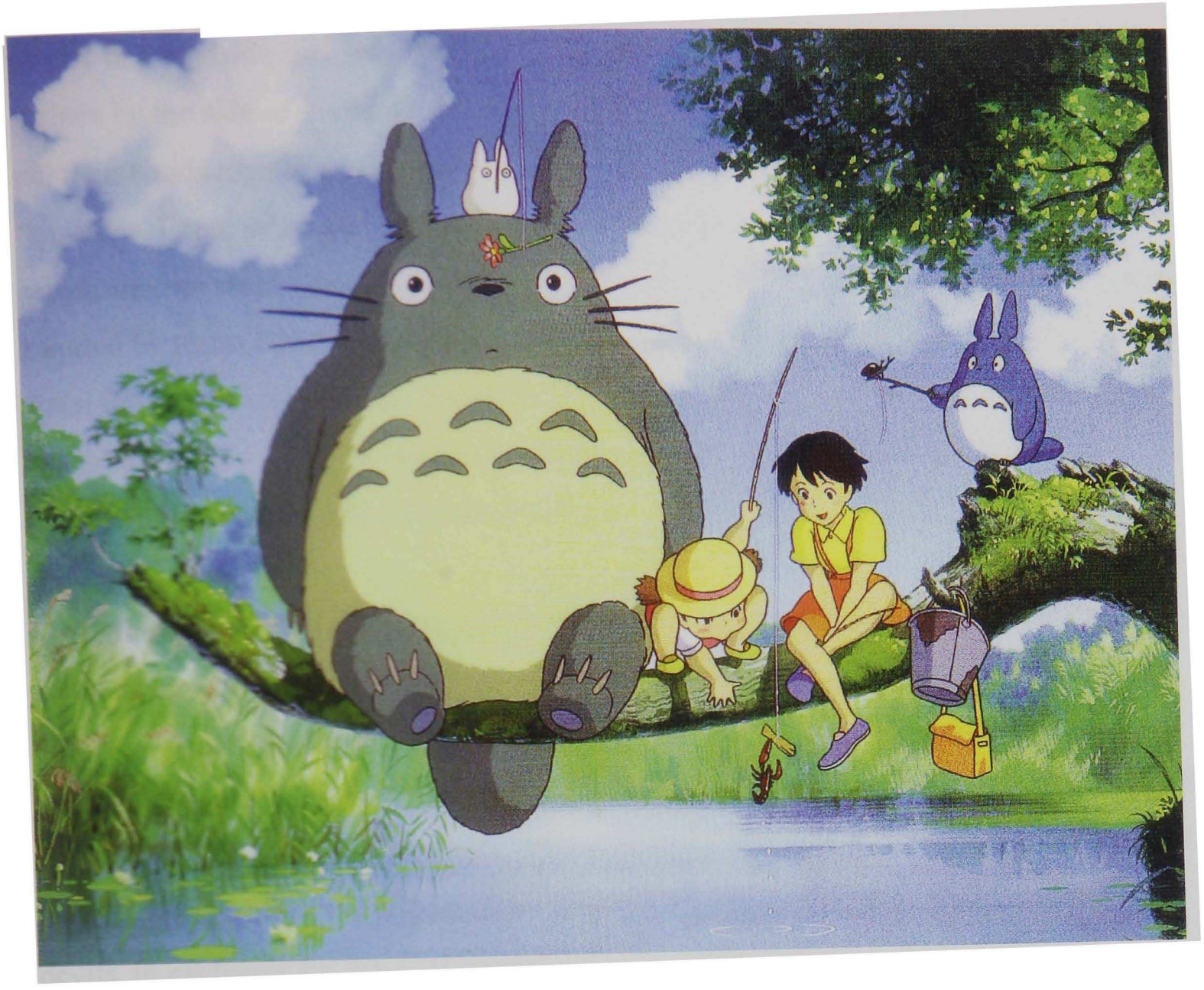
> One might be tempted to regard such monster consumerism as yet another by-product of modern Japanese capitalism. In fact, the promulgation of monsters for profit is nothing new to Japan. More than 200 years ago, Edo culture was already reinventing traditional folklore to produce its own consumer-oriented monster boom. Monster-inspired children's toys flourished. Monsters were popping up in books, woodblock prints and on the stage, and as eye-catchers in commercial advertising. (Kabat 2001, 66)

Adam Kabat cites *Tôfu Kozô*, or tofu boy as one example. Dating from the 18th century, *Tôfu Kozô* was a popular figure, 'an Edo version of Hello Kitty.' (Kabat 2001, 75) *Tôfu Kozô* has featured recently as a character in a children's book, and the best selling mystery novelist Kyôgoku Natsuhiko has made *Tôfu Kozô* the hero of a serialised novel. Similarly the story of *Hyakki yakô* (Night Parade of One Hundred Demons), which first became popular in the Heian Period (794-1185), became the basis for the *hyakki monogatari*, a ghost story game that developed in the Edo Period. One example, an *e-maki* (handscroll paintings), dating from the 16th century at Shinjuan temple in Kyoto and attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu, shows various creatures, including *oni*, and transformations of objects, but is 'humorous rather than fearful.' (Deguchi 1985, 15) The popularity of the game lead to various printed books entitled *hyakki monogatari* in the 17th and 18th century. Katsushika

Hokusai's print *Shinban uki-e bakemono yashiki hyaku monogatari no zu* (New Version of a Perspective Print: Haunted House One Hundred Supernatural Tales) is another example. In the early 19th century ghost stories attained a golden age. (Deguchi 1985, 19) This is similar to the pre-modern to postmodernism connection which was highlighted in chapter 3, where the argument was put forward that this was possibly a method of avoiding the traumatic issue of defeat and occupation after World War II.

Does the recycling into games, comic books and popular entertainment though also represent the degradation of Shintô myth into 'kitsch mythology'? Japanese *manga* and *anime* take a large number of their stories from Shintô legends, leading Antonia Levi to argue that Shintô's animistic gods and their legends have survived into the modern era. (Levi 1996) Japanese animators and *manga* artists use *kami* because, as a part of Japanese childhood, they immediately resonate with their audiences. Shintô's ability to blend the fantastic with everyday life is also key to its success in the world of *manga* and *anime*. Sarah Thal, in her study of the creation of the modern *kami* in 19th century Japan, shows how representation of *kami* constantly changes throughout Japanese history, and states 'it is through redefining their gods that people redefine themselves, their values, and their communities.' (Thal 2002, 379)

Miyazaki Hayao's *anime Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi* (Spirited Away) 2001 also features numerous monsters and ghosts, and references to various Shintô traditions. The word '*Kamikakushi*' is written using the characters for *kami*, and '*kakushi*', meaning the sudden disappearance of a child. Chihiro, a ten-year-old girl in the midst of a move to the suburbs, with her parents wanders into the mysterious town. It is the 'other world' of gods and monsters, and ruled over by a witch called *Yu-baba*. In Miyazaki's *anime Tonari no Totoro* (My Neighbour *Totoro*) 1988, eleven-year-old Satsuki and four-year-old Mei move to a new home in the country. (Ill.5-17) The name '*totoro*' comes from Mei's mispronunciation of the word '*tororu*', which is the Japanese word for 'troll', a reference to their book the Norwegian folktale *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*. In the film a rope on *Totoro*'s tree, a *shimenawa*, which is made of rice straw and paper ribbons, signifies that the tree is sacred, that *kami* are present. In the film the father and the girls bow to the tree, thanking the spirit for protecting Mei. On their way home, when rain breaks out, they seek



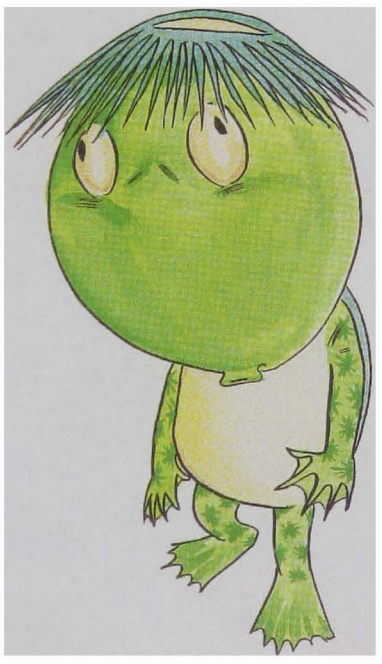
5-17. Miyazaki Hayao, 1988
Tonari no totoro (My Neighbour *Totoro*)
Anime DVD cover
Studio Ghibli

shelter in a roadside shrine to *Ojizô sama*, part of the Japanese tradition of building small shrines by the side of the road, often as a memorial to a child who died. Satsuki and Mei put their hands together, bow, and ask the *Ojizô sama* for permission to stay there until the rain stops. Later, when the girls are waiting at the bus stop for their father, they come across another shrine, this one to *Inari san*, the rice god. These popular Shintô shrines are guarded by statues of foxes. *Kitsune*, the fox spirit is closely associated with *Inari*, and has given the name to *inarizushi* (a sushi ball wrapped in *abura age*) and *kitsune udon* (*abura age* with noodles). *Kitsune* tend to be elegant and well-mannered tricksters and can transform into people, often beautiful women.

Contemporary versions of monsters demonstrate a development according to the cute aesthetic already highlighted in chapter 1 with the design of the *Yonda?* pandas. Mizuki Shigeru's works can be compared with Tezuka Osamu's *manga Dororo*, which also features a variety of monsters and ghosts appearing one after another. First published in the monthly magazine *Bôken-ô* in 1971, *Dororo* is the story of Daigo Kagemitsu, who works for a Samurai general, and offers forty-eight body parts of his unborn baby to forty-eight devils, in exchange for his wish to take over the country. The baby had forty-eight parts of his body taken when it was born, and was thrown into a river. The baby survived and grew into a boy who called himself *Hyakki Maru*. He meets a boy thief named Dororo and together they go after the forty-eight devils, and each time he eliminates one, he gets back one of his missing body parts. An array of Japanese monsters, so prevelant in Japanese popular culture, also appear in works by contemporary artists.

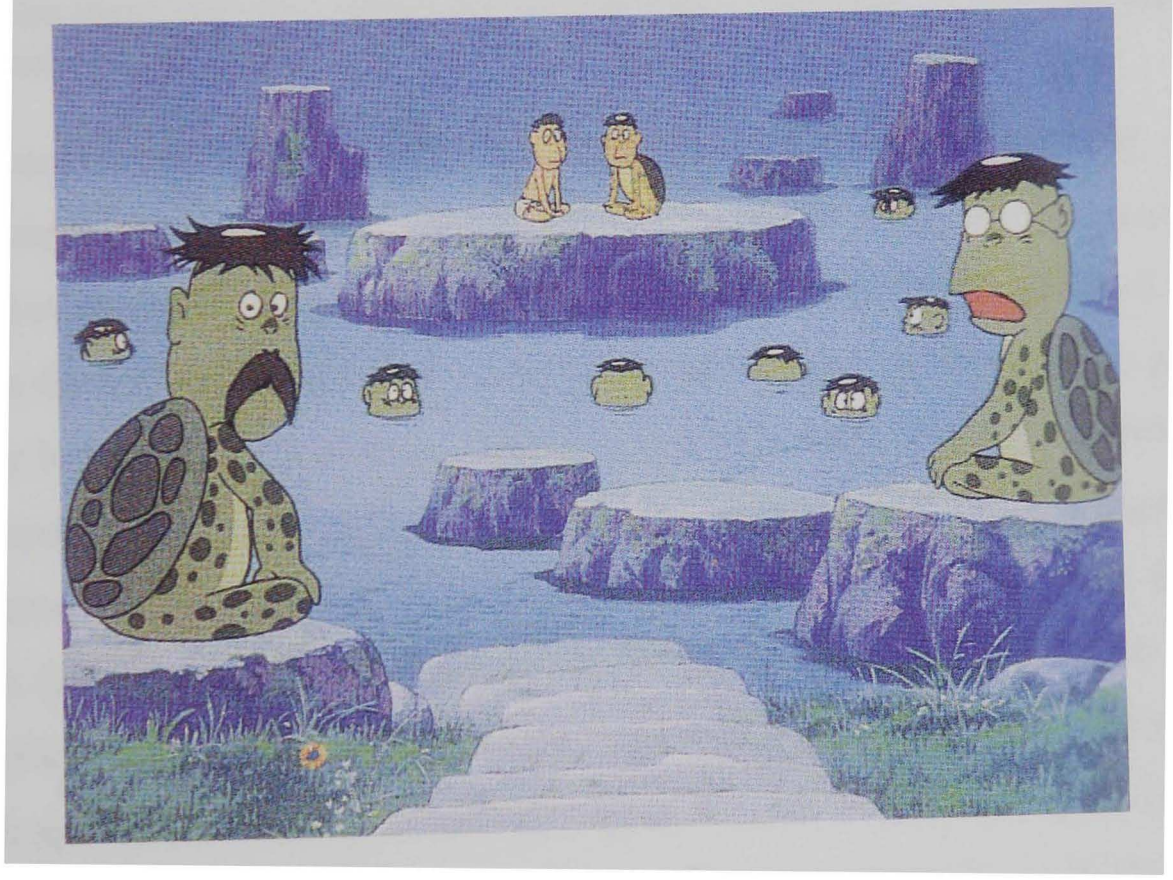
Nara's work *Kappa* 1997 (Ill.5-18) depicts one of the most well known monsters in Japan, scaly green turtle river monsters with webbed fingers, a beak-like snout, and a bowl-like depression on the top of their heads, which is filled with water and gives supernatural powers. Mizuki Shigeru also studied *kappa*, (Ill.5-19) a cute version of an earlier depiction by Toriyama Sekien. (Ill.5-20) Mizuki's *anime Kappa no Sanpei* 1993 is the story of a boy called Sanpei who befriends a young *kappa*. (Ill.5-21) *Kappa* are known for dragging people into the water and then either sucking their intestines out through their anuses according to one version, or just eating the anus itself according to another. *Kappamaki* (cucumber sushi) is named after *kappa* because of their liking for cucumbers, and the best way to befriend a *kappa* is to give it cucumbers. If you write your name on a cucumber and

5-18. Nara Yoshitomo, 1997
Kappa
Watercolour on paper
26 x 18 cm
From Rothenburger (ed.) 2001, 45



5-19. Mizuki Shigeru, 1992
Kappa
From *Yôkai Gadan* (Monster Encyclopaedia), p159
Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten

5-20. Toriyama Sekien, 1784
Kappa
From Toriyama 1992, 36



5-21. Mizuki Shigeru, 1993
Kappa no sanpei
Scene from the *anime*

throw it into the river, the *kappa* in the river will remember your name and won't bother you. *Kappa* enjoy having matches of *shôgi* (a game similar to chess), and *sumô* wrestling. The *kappa* is incredibly strong for its size, a trick is to bow deeply before a match so the *kappa* spills the water from its head when it returns your bow, and becomes weak.

Miyazaki Hayao's 1994 *anime Heisei Tanuki Gassen Pompoko* (Heisei Era *Tanuki* Battle *Pompoko*) is the story of a group of *tanuki*, which like foxes, are animals whose magic powers are well known in Japanese folklore, whose habitat is under threat from development as Tokyo expands. There is a monster parade scene reminiscent of the *Hyakki yakô*, when the *tanuki* use their ability to transform to oppose the human encroachment into their territory. The *tanuki* succeed in scaring the construction workers off, but a new construction crew arrives to resume work the next day. As Mizuki Shigeru notes, the theme of nature and the threat of development is important to such monster narratives.

> In places like New Guinea, where there's a lot of untouched nature, it's much easier to talk about spirits with other people because they feel and breathe their presence. People often call me a lunatic when I say things like this. But big cities are like scabs on the Earth – *yokai* and natural forces are disappearing from these places because there isn't any nature left in which they can survive. (Mizuki quoted in Kawashima 2002, 14)

Mizuki's monster world is spooky, and strange, but also cheerful and beautiful, set a long time ago, when people were living with nature. As Tajiri Satoshi indicates a nostalgic element is also evident in *Pokemon*. Tajiri preserved the world of his childhood, the late 1970s, when the rice fields gave way to shopping centres, and the forests were paved over to make way for apartment buildings, highways and train lines. 'A fish pond would become an arcade centre,' he says. (Chua-Eoan and Larimer 1999, 85) The digital *Pokemon* game had its origins hundreds of years ago, with boys in rural Japan fighting with beetles. (Drazen 2003) *Pokemon* is a way for children of a new generation to have a chance to collect insects and other creatures the way they did. Collecting *Pokemon* and pitting them against one another is not a new kind of quest, simply one updated with technology. In Japan, grandfathers still tell of growing up in the midst of World War II, catching crickets for fights with the other boys. (Chua-Eoan and Larimer 1999, 80-93) Nostalgia plays a key role, and this will be examined in chapter 6.

Conclusion

Through Murakami and Nara's works we can trace a history of monster representation, ending in the cute monsters of the *Pokemon* phenomenon. The transformation from the cute to the grotesque is a key motif in the works of Murakami and Nara. This switching between monsters and cute characters or children is connected to the postmodern condition of schizophrenia, as described by Deleuze and Guattari and Jameson, as the rapid flashing of random signifiers, and a dislocation of historical progression, into a continuous present. The revolutionary potential of the schizophrenic process with respect to capitalism, highlighted by Deleuze and Guattari, provides Murakami with a critical position, by representing the acceleration of this process and expose the limits of capitalism.

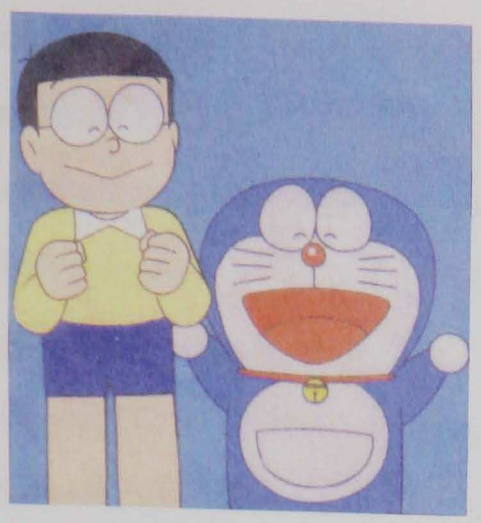
Examination of these works revealed cuteness to be associated with the flip side of the grotesque, and a covering-up of a traumatic memory, and a kind of a post-traumatic comforting. It is linked to the traumas associated with World War II by Murakami, and childhood by Nara, a subject which is examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 6 Nostalgia

Nostalgia is one of the key sentiments evoked by cuteness. Brian McVeigh states that 'probably the most important reason cited to account for *Hello Kitty*'s popularity is the feelings of nostalgia (*natsukashii*) she evokes.' (McVeigh 2000, 237) The popularity of *Hello Kitty*, who first appeared in 1974, can at least be partially accounted for by the childhood memories of women now in their twenties and thirties who continue to consume *Hello Kitty* products. McVeigh, referring to Grant McCracken's study *Culture and Consumption* 1988, puts forward the argument that nostalgia involves a removal from the 'here and now' to the relative safety of another time or place. (McVeigh 2000, 237) The nostalgia that cuteness in commodities evokes becomes 'a bridge to displaced meaning and an idealized vision of life as it should be lived.' (McCracken 1988, 110)

'The Doraemon' exhibition held at the Suntory Museum in Osaka and the Sogô Museum in the Sogô department store in Yokohama 2003, celebrated the 25th anniversary of the television *anime* series. The character *Doraemon*, which unlike *Hello Kitty* stated as a character in the *manga* by Fujiko F. Fujio, can be compared to *Hello Kitty* both in terms of popularity and the extent of associated merchandising. The *manga*, first published in *Coro Coro Comic* in 1970, is the story of a ten-year-old boy, Nobita, and his adventures with *Doraemon*, a blue cat-type robot. (Ill.6-1) *Doraemon* has sold over 100 million volumes in Japan, and an animated series, which was first shown on Asahi Television in 1979, has run for 1,600 episodes. (Kan 2003, 15) It is also popular in Thailand, Vietnam and Hong Kong, where *Doraemon* is known as *Ding Dong*. The thirty artists who contributed to the exhibition, included Nara Yoshitomo, Murakami Takashi, Hiromix, Ninagawa Mika and Fukuda Miran. The overall feeling of the exhibition was one of nostalgia, and the catalogue's biography of the artists featured artists' photos from their childhood. Kashiwagi Hiroshi's essay for the exhibition catalogue was titled 'Longing for the Vanished Scenery,' highlighting both a nostalgia for childhood, for a lost or missing innocence, and a by-gone Japan. (Kashiwagi 2002, 4-5)

Nostalgia suggests a certain disenchantment with some aspect of the present, and a kind of temporal escape. It stems from an inability to focus on our present, argues Jameson, who identifies nostalgia with a desperate attempt to appropriate a missing past or lost reality.



6-1. Fujiko F. Fujio, 1974
Nobita and *Doraemon*
Promotional flier

6-2. Nara Yoshitomo, 2002
Gian ni ribon o torareta Doramichan (Doramichan's ribbon was taken by Gian)
Acrylic on cotton
181.5 x 259 cm
From Suntory Museum 2003, 46-47

(Jameson 1991, 156) John Whittier Treat also questions why childhood is idealized as a 'lost object' at the expense of a 'future' adulthood. (Treat 1993, 353) A utopian future is, however, as much an escape from the present as nostalgia. The nostalgic and utopian impulses share a common rejection of the here and now, both seem to suggest an equally idealistic drive. Nostalgia is the past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire. The aesthetics of nostalgia are less a matter of simple memory than of 'complex projection'; nostalgic distancing 'sanitizes as it selects'. (Hutcheon 1998, n.p.) There is a distinction between nostalgia and critical memory, and in the 20th century as the horrors of World War II were gradually discovered and perhaps more rapidly forgotten, there was a new nostalgia for innocence, and a new consumerist nostalgia that uses cuteness as a superficial covering up of an ugly past. Svetlana Boym's study of nostalgia, while acknowledging that nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, points out it is also 'a romance with one's own fantasy.' (Boym 2001, xiii) Following this argument the importance of cuteness becomes more apparent. 'Nostalgia is to memory as kitsch is to art.' (Charles Maier quoted in Boym 2001, xiv)

Childhood memory is a key feature of the works of Nara Yoshitomo, where cuteness evokes the world of children and our own childhood. Often using watercolours and coloured pencils, Nara's pictures resonate with Jameson description of nostalgia as an 'infantile regression.' (Jameson 1991, 283) Nara's children are not always cute in themselves: his portraits often feature mischievous or even monstrous looking little girls. By including an element of horror or sadness, Nara highlights nostalgia as an idealised past, one that perhaps involves a forgetting as much as a remembering.

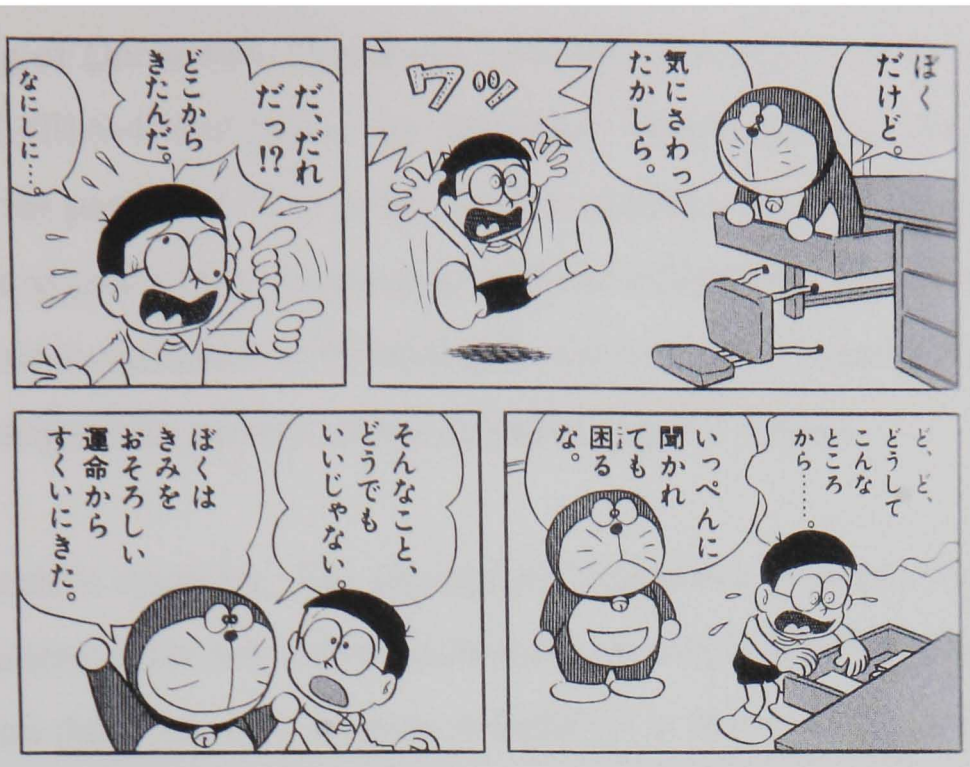
Nara's work for the *Doraemon* exhibition, *Gian ni ribon o torareta Doramichan* (*Doramichan*'s ribbon was taken by *Gian*) 2002, depicts *Doraemon*'s little sister *Doramichan*. (Ill.6-2) Usually a very cute yellow robot with cat's ears and long eyelashes, in Nara's portrait she appears almost frightening. Nara describes an episode of the television series in which Nobita's friend and bully *Gian*, after having been accidentally given a potion that turned him into a girl, stole *Doramichan*'s ribbon. (Nara 2003, 90) *Doramichan*'s secret is that she has 1000 horsepower, having been built two years after *Doraemon*, who only has 129.3 horsepower, and this is the reason, according to Nara's comments in the catalogue, for her scary eyes in his painting. (Nara 2003, 90) While the cuteness of Nara's works evoke the nostalgic process, the violent, or disturbing element

that he includes, destroys that kitschness. By combining nostalgia with the horrors and traumas of the past that actually we would rather forget, is Nara's motive a deconstruction of nostalgia? Children often act cute when they've done something naughty, and Nara's 1999 exhibition 'No They Didn't' forces this question on to viewers. (Joynes 1999, 106) The aim of this chapter is to examine how artists have manipulated the cuteness associated with nostalgia, and what they have uncovered beneath its surface.

Postmodern Nostalgia: 'the phantasmal parodic rehabilitation of all lost referentials'

Doraemon is one of the most popular characters in Japan and is subject to the huge merchandising that surrounds other character goods such as *Hello Kitty* and *Pokemon*. *Doraemon*'s creator Fujimoto Hiroshi is one of the most prolific and successful creative duo in *manga* history. Fujimoto recruited his old elementary school classmate Abiko Motoo, and together they created forty-nine *manga* series under the name Fujiko F. Fujio. In *Doraemon* the story surrounds Nobi Nobita, a ten-year-old fourth-grade boy who wears glasses and lives in a suburb of Tokyo. Nobita's great-great-grandson Sewashi lives in the 22nd century with the family in poverty thanks to mistakes Nobita made during his lifetime. To rectify this Sewashi sends his robot *Doraemon* back into the past to help Nobita, and one day *Doraemon* suddenly pops up out of Nobita's desk drawer, armed with a *yojigen* (fourth-dimension) pocket on his front which contains gadgets from the 22nd century. (Ill.6-3) This illustration, from the very first *manga*, also shows how *Doraemon*'s design developed to become simpler, and more rounded, in the now standard design, representing an evolution according to the cute aesthetic highlighted in chapter 1. It turns out that *Doraemon* has one less screw than the other robots, due to an accident in the manufacture process, an imperfection, almost a lack, that lends itself to the endearing cuteness of *Doraemon* as a character, and most attempts to help Nobita go comically wrong.

In 'The Doraemon' exhibition the kitsch cuteness of many of the works highlight issues of high and low, fine art and popular culture, cuteness and commodification previously discussed in chapter 3. Works such as the *Doraemon* crystal by *Baccarat*, and Fukuda Miran's *Rembrandt Self-Portrait with Palette* 2002, which depicts Rembrandt in front of a



6-3. Fujiko F. Fujio, 1974
Doraemon manga vol.1, p7
Tentômushi Comics
Tokyo: Shôgakukan

6-4. Murakami Takashi, 2002
Vacance d'eté de moi et petit et Doraemon
Acrylic on canvas
180.5 x 180 cm
From Suntory Museum 2003, 38-39

huge oil painting of *Doraemon*. Murakami Takashi's *Vacance d'eté de moi et petit frère et Doraemon* 2002 (Ill.6-4) featured in the exhibition (and which later also became the image for a CD cover for pop band *Uzu*), while he also animated a new ending sequence for the television series as part of the programme's jubilee celebration. This chapter focuses on the element of cuteness associated with nostalgia, and how Nara in particular can offer valuable new insight into its role within Japanese popular culture.

Kashiwagi Hiroshi's essay for 'The Doraemon' exhibition catalogue focuses on the background scenery in the television series and a nostalgia for 1970s Japan when there were few cars on the roads and children still played in the street. (Kashiwagi 2002, 4-5) Kashiwagi looks back to a Japan still in the process of motorisation, and recognizes that the vacant land which the children often play in, was soon to be developed. Playtime for children was also decreasing as hours in school and homework increased, in fact when *Doraemon* was broadcast, Kashiwagi argues, the scenery, the streets and towns, the everyday lives of children were all in the process of change. After experiencing the economic boom of the 1960s Japan was moving from an industrial society to a consumer society. It was also a period, Kashiwagi points out, when youth in the post-war towns were expressing rebellion, and turning to alternative culture. West Coast American hippies and their back to nature ideology for example, similarly represented a rejection of the present that was being expressed in various areas of popular culture, rock music, design, *manga* and art. (Kashiwagi 2002, 4-5)

Fujiko had said Nobita was based on himself as a boy in his 1998 essay 'Fujiko F. Fujio's World.' (Kashiwagi 2002, 4) The nostalgic subject is according to Treat, an 'ideolgical subject' produced by contemporary Japanese socio-cultural discourses.

> It is recognised by its equivocal accommodation with 'everyday life' through a retreat into the past *and* by its resistance to that same life through its longing for another sort of life, one that never actually 'was' because no such life ever 'is'. (Treat 1993, 384)

There is a forgetting that is key to nostalgia that Treat alludes to. Svetlana Boym also argues that rapid industrialisation and modernisation leads to nostalgia, by 'increasing the intensity of people's longing for the slower rhythms of the past, for continuity, social cohesion and tradition,' and yet this new obsession with the past reveals 'an abyss of forgetting.' (Boym 2001, 16) By contrast, Roland Robertson identifies nostalgia as an

important ingredient in the modern invention of national traditions, and argues such places offer a sense of community and identity. (Robertson 1990)

Nostalgia is an important emotion for writer Yoshimoto Banana, leading Kamata Tôji to call nostalgia her literature's 'key word', (Kamata quoted in Treat 1993, 376) while John Whittier Treat argues her 'pink-covered novels of nostalgic schoolgirls have raised the aesthetic of cuteness to new heights in contemporary Japan.' (Treat 1993, 353) *Kanashî yokan* (sad premonition) 1988 for example, is a novel that Yoshimoto described while writing it as 'a story about the retrieval of lost memory.' (Yoshimoto Banana quoted in Treat 1993, 375)

Yoshimoto collaborated with Nara for the book *Hinagiku no jinsei* (The Life of Hinagiku) 2000, which combined Yoshimoto's text and Nara's illustrations. She also contributed to the 2001 'Lullaby Supermarket' exhibition catalogue with her essay 'The Lines He Draws.' (Yoshimoto 2001, 47-48) In Yoshimoto Banana's novel *Tsugumi (Goodbye Tsugumi)* 1989 the character Tsugumi is similar to one of Nara's evil children. *Tsugumi* is an examination of the relationship between two teenage cousins, Shirakawa Maria and Yamamoto Tsugumi, growing up in a seaside town. Tsugumi, who is chronically ill, possesses a mischievous charm that both maddens and amuses her family. In the novel Maria describes Tsugumi as malicious, rude, she had a foul mouth, selfish, horribly spoiled, and brilliantly sneaky. Tsugumi's tenuous health seems to free her from the behavioral norms that governs Maria allowing her to swear, play tricks and shock adults in a way Maria resents, envies and admires.

In *Slash with Knife* 1998, (Ill.6-5) or *Dead Flower* 1994, where the girl standing next to a cut flower holds a saw, 'Nara's "innocent babes" express an inner rebellion bordering on demonic possession.' (Joynes 1999, 106)

> Be they painted or drawn figures or fibreglass sculptures, his children and dogs awaken emotions in their viewer by their cuteness, behind which, aggressions often lurk. (Brehm 2001, 10)

For Nara, who often refers to punk, which he listens to while working in his studio, (Tresher 2001, 16) punk is a rejection of conformity. Refusing to grow up, to stay childlike, can also be seen as a way of resistance, or defiance, a refusal of adulthood.

6-5. Nara Yoshitomo, 1998
Slash With Knife
Acrylic on paper
46 x 29.5cm
From Rothenburger (ed.) 2001, 61

6-6. *Doraemon* graffiti in Shibuya, 2003
Photo the author

To take sweet images from childhood, even as children could draw them, and infuse them with so much sharp-edged angst, the contrast of subject matter and mood creates a disturbing effect. (Besher 1999, n.p.) Nara states however that these weapons are not instruments of aggression.

> Look at them, they are so small, like toys. Do you think they could fight with those? I don't think so. Rather, I kind of see the children among other, bigger, bad people all around them, who are holding bigger knives.
> (Nara quoted in Besher 1999, n.p.)

This resonates with child psychoanalyst Melanie Klein who makes an inherent connection between the way in which children strive to cope with a challenging existence and the behavior of psychotic adults. Klein's assertion that adults never really release the emotional trauma they go through as children. (Money-Kyrle 1984) Klein's 1932 book *The Psychoanalysis of Children* proposed that the infant has a primary object relation to the mother and experiences a psychic life dominated by sadistic phantasies deriving from an innate aggressive drive. Klein explored the relationship between mourning and primitive defense mechanisms and introduced the idea of the paranoid-schizoid position as a fundamental phase of development.

An alternative illustration of *Doraemon* might represent a public expression of some of these aggressive elements. The photograph of an evil *Doraemon* painted with horns by a graffiti artist in Shibuya provides a snap shot of an ironic mark that resonates with Nara's devilish children, and captures a scene of postmodern nostalgia. (Ill.6-6) Linda Hutcheon's study into nostalgia and the postmodern, argues postmodernism, particularly through architecture, brought about the conjunction of irony and nostalgia through its deliberate ironised return to history. (Hutcheon 1998 n.p.) The postmodern recalling of the past expresses through its ironic distance, a dissatisfaction with modernity and the unquestioned belief in perpetual modernisation, rather than a nostalgic escape to an idealised past. Postmodernism recalls the past, but with the kind of ironic double vision that acknowledges the final impossibility of indulging in nostalgia, even as it consciously evokes nostalgia's affective power.

> From a postmodern point of view, the knowingness of this kind of irony may be not so much a defense against the power of nostalgia as the way in which nostalgia is made palatable today: invoked but, at the same time, undercut, put into perspective, seen for exactly what it is, a comment on the present as much as on the past.
> (Hutcheon 1998, n.p.)

In postmodernism nostalgia gets both called up, exploited, and ironised. This ironising of nostalgia, may be one way the postmodern creates a distance necessary for reflective thought about the present as well as the past.

Yoshimoto Banana's novel *Tsugumi* suggets an 'already always' nostalgia, argues Treat, postmodern in nature because it is so obviously simulated. Yoshimoto is popular among *shôjo*, her readers are often themselves teenage girls like Tsugumi or Maria, but there is also an older audience. As Treat points out, the novel was serialized in the Japanese edition of *Marie Clair*, a middlebrow women's magazine and marketed to the office lady in her early adulthood. (Treat 1993, 353-387) The object of this nostalgia is 'that *kawaii* world made up of cousins, boyfriends, and favourite pets,' but that this perfect world is not only gone, but was in fact never quite here to begin with. (Treat 1993, 377) Yoshimoto's contemporary nostalgia lacks any determined past to validate it. It is, he argues,

> an experience of the 'present' without a real-life referent, one that makes sense only as the much-vaunted 'empty signifier' associated with postmodernity. (Treat 1993, 377)

Tsugumi's postscript, for example, recasts the novel as an *aide de memoire* which serves to reconstruct nostalgically Yoshimoto's own happy youth and family. Such nostalgia is at root contradictory, argues Treat, posing the question 'what kind of longing could there be without the very memory that Yoshimoto fears losing?' (Treat 1993, 380) Crucially Yoshimoto's point of view is that of a person already nostalgic for nostalgia, 'one who now reflexively makes nostalgia available to critical scrutiny.' (Treat 1993, 379)

Matsui argues Nara's subject matter and technique successfully embodies a mental state that can be provisionally called the 'adolescent', defined by Julia Kristeva as the mode of radical imagination that traverses the frontiers of differences of sex or identity, reality or fantasy. (Matsui 1999, 8-13) It embodies an indeterminant state that fluctuates between adult and child, reality and fiction.

> 'Child' frequently functions as a medium of repressed memory. At the same time, it becomes an agent of the emotional or perceptual power that deviates from the morals and standards of 'adult' social systems, challenging its effective economy, threatening to break its balance. (Matsui 2001, 169)

In *The Adolescent Novel* 1990, Kristeva describes the case of a neurotic teenage girl, who cured herself by creating a narrative comic, combining illustrations and words in English, a foreign language to her. Kristeva discusses this as an example of a restabilisation of a

chaotic psychic world through the semiotic process outside of the standard symbolic representation. (Matsui 2001, 173) This resonates with Hiromix's book *Chokkan o migaku bunseki koso subete* (the analysis which polishes the intuition is everything) 2002, a collection of diary entries, rough sketches, ink drawings, photos and poems, mostly about love and life, all of them in English, in messy handwriting. Nara too keeps a diary, on his website 'Happy Hour', and also refers to his notebook sketches as a form of diary. Matsui argues that drawing is also an in between form of art, which stands in opposition to painting as a finished product. Drawings do not aim at completeness, and are a form that portray fragments as fragments. (Matsui 2001, 168-175)

Nara's portraits of children seem to be always of little girls, 'cute embodiments of infantilism in their chubby-cheeked plumpness.' (Trescher 2001, 17) Little girls are particularly popular kitsch characters, recalling the 'innocent happiness of childhood.' (Solomon 1991, 13) In Catherine Robson's study of the idealisation and idolisation of little girls (in Victorian England), she puts forward a version of male development in which men become masculine only after an initial feminine stage, opposing Freud's account of the process by which all children are male until they notice their lack. (Robson 2001) In this light, little girls represent not just the true essence of childhood, but also an adult male's best opportunity of reconnecting with his own lost self. Sawaragi recalls Kishida Ryûsei's famous portraits of a little girl. (Sawaragi 2001b, 96-103) Kishida, who produced many of his finest works around 1920, is usually remembered for his portraits of Reiko, his daughter. He also often used watercolors and sketches, to capture quickly her fleeting moods. He was inspired by the work of modern European painters, especially Henri Matisse and Fauvism, but there is also a nostalgia present for ancient Japan.

Matsui also refers to the 'fairy-tale world' defined by the philosopher Yoshimoto Takaaki, which is typified by the thinking of a child. Yoshimoto explained its function by describing the special 'vision' dominating the fairy tales of the novelist and poet Miyazawa Kenji, Nara's favourite author. (Matsui 2001, 171) The 'strange distortion' of its landscape is influenced by the laws of dream representation. (Matsui 2001, 168-175)

> The smooth connection of reality and fantasy is omnipresent in Nara's paintings. In 'Six O'clock Morning, My Arms Extend –Maybe I'm Dreaming?' precisely embodies the sensation of the child floating on the border zone between dream and awakened consciousness. (Matsui 2001, 172)

The blank backgrounds of Nara's paintings such as *Princess of Snooze* 2000 add to this 'floating' effect, and reinforce the psychoanalytic component of Nara's works.

Parallels to the behaviour of children at play can be recognised in *otaku* culture and the associated fanatic drive to collect irrelevant information. It is an example of regression into childhood, and a form of refusal to become an adult.

> The current younger generation seems to believe instinctively, and as a kind of protective mechanism, that the only possibility of saving their identity from further erosion is to remain in a state of childlike innocence.
> (Brehm 2002a, 17)

Brehm goes on to argue that,

> The resulting *infantilisation of society*, however, not only increases their manipulability, but is easily utilised as a compensation mechanism by the post-capitalist economic system, and thus for additional profit.
> (Brehm 2002a, 17)

Svetlana Boym refers to the 'inculcation of nostalgia' into merchandise as a marketing strategy that tricks consumers into missing what they haven't lost. (Boym 2001, 38) John Whittier Treat also argues that 'it is the function of nostalgia to supply what is lacking, or more correctly, to create a "lack" that then demands a supplement.' (Treat 1993, 383) This is a combination of commercial nostalgia, that teaches us to miss things we have never lost, and 'armchair nostalgia', that exists without any lived experience of the yearned-for time. (Hutcheon 1998, n.p.)

The ubiquity of nostalgia in *shôjo* culture, Treat argues, is a demonstration of how experience is now 'thoroughly ideologized' by the structures of late model capitalism. (Treat 1993, 383) Whether as Japan's 'retro' boom, that seeks to recall the allegedly carefree (American) 1950s, or as a yearning for a childhood or family that similarly never existed, such nostalgia would seem to prove that it is indeed a 'desire without object, a desire that is produced simply for desire's sake.' (Treat 1993, 383)

Nostalgia is given extra meaning and value at millennial moments. The millennium is defined by mankind's desire to find absolution in the past, a condition both of nostalgia and mourning.

> The twentieth century began with a futuristic utopia and ended with nostalgia. Optimistic belief in the future was discarded like an outmoded spaceship ended sometime in the 1960s. (Boym 2001, xiv)

Nostalgia may be more of an attempt to defy the end, to evade teleology. 'In a broader sense, nostalgia is a rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress.' (Boym 2001, xv) Andreas Huyssen has argued 'The more memory we store on data banks, the more the past is sucked into the orbit of the present, ready to be called up on the screen,' making the past simultaneous with the present in a new way. (Huyssen 1995, 253) Jean Baudrillard calls nostalgia 'the phantasmal parodic rehabilitation of all lost referentials.' (Baudrillard 1993, 372) Baudrillard quotes Ellias Cannetti, who claimed that, as of a certain point, history was no longer real. The atomic bombs of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Cannetti argued, destroyed the last 'valid myth': the sun; 'the atomic bomb has become the measure of all things. The tinniest thing has won: a paradox of power.' (Cannetti 1985, 69) Baudrillard articulates the importance of the circulation of nostalgia in the production of postmodern reality. When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning, argues Baudrillard, due to the collapse of the real with a panic-stricken production of the real. (Baudrillard 1983)

Jameson states that 'a history lesson is the best cure for nostalgic pathos', (Jameson 1991, 156) and refers to nostalgia as an 'infantile regression.' (Jameson 1991, 283) This connects with the process of 'infantilization' previously discussed in chapter 2. Jameson analyses what he calls the postmodern 'nostalgia film', that reveal a 'desperate attempt to appropriate a missing past.' (Jameson 1991, 19) However, he points out that nostalgia films do allow an allegorical processing of the past, and new and more complex 'post nostalgia' statements become possible. Jameson's preference is for science fiction over these 'nostalgia' films. While critics of nostalgia deem it a false consciousness that, in defiance of the logic of historical dialectics, looks longingly backward to obsolete social structures, the historicisation of nostalgia itself, might lead to an awareness of how we and our present are produced as subjects within and by nostalgia, and the possibility of a changed relationship with the contemporary moment we inhabit. (Treat 1993)

Teddy Bears and Art

There is a sadness often present in Nara's works. In Nara's sculpture *Fountain of Life*

6-7. *H* magazine, February 2004
Magazine cover vol.65 featuring Dick Bruna's *Miffy*
Tokyo: Rockin' on 2

6-8. Nara Yoshitomo, 2001
I don't mind if you forget me (detail)
Installation
From Yokohama Museum of Art 2001, 1

2001, which featured in the 'I Don't Mind If You Forget Me' exhibition, tears constantly stream down the white cheeks of seven crying baby heads stacked in an oversized teacup. In *Fountain of Sorrow* 2001 five small dogs face each other over a hole, crying. 'Nostalgia has, in this way, been deemed the necessary inspirational creative sorrow for artists.' (Hutcheon 1998) There is a certain sadness evoked by cuteness, the subject of a magazine feature entitled 'Bitter Sweet in everyday life', and emphasised by this image of Dick Bruna's character *Miffy*. (Ill.6-7) Sanrio's Tsuji Shintarô refers to himself as an orphan, in his troubled childhood during World War II, his mother died when he was thirteen, his father left, and Tsuji went to live with his aunt. (Belson and Bremner 2004) *Doraemon* also contains this element of sadness. *Doraemon* is blue, unlike the other robots that are yellow, because he cried for ten days when his ears were bitten off by a robot mouse while he was taking a nap one day, and the tears eventually turned him blue. This was *Doraemon*'s own childhood trauma. Nara's works play on memories of pain and torment. Defense of nostalgia usually draws on the significance psychoanalysis gives to the relationship between identity and the personal psychic past unearthed by memory. This relationship becomes the model for the link between collective identity and memory.

How have stuffed toys and teddy bears entered the world of fine art? Sawaragi Noi considers this issue in his essay 'Stuffed Animals = [object of change] crossing borders.' (Sawaragi 2001b, 96-103) Sawaragi compares the teddy bears that appear in Nara's sign for the exhibition 'I don't mind if you forget me' (Ill.6-8) to the work of Mike Kelley. The connection with Kelley is one that Nara himself acknowledges, in his conversation with Murakami Takashi in *Bijutsu Techô*, for example. (Murakami and Nara 2001, 129-144) Kelley began to use found stuffed animal toys in 1990. Teddy bears and soft toys were hidden under blankets in his 'Dialogue' series in 1991, and the 'Empathy Displacement: Humanoid Morphology' series in 1990 featured handmade dolls placed in boxes. The stuffed toys by Mike Kelley are slightly soiled, their eyes are falling out, their ears are hanging off, they are worn out. Sawaragi reasons that while these stuffed bears have all been well loved, nevertheless they have been thrown away. (Sawaragi 2001b, 96-103) Were the child owners forced by parents to throw them away, or were they discarded once the children had tired of them and moved on, perhaps? The bear's owner might even have died. Mike Kelley 'invests his toys with a narrative which is often sentimental, and in our culture "sentimentality" means "emotion."' (Haim Steinbach quoted in Budney 1996, 88) While they conjure up notions of 'pathetic sublime', 'retroactive infancy', 'infantile

recidivism', Mike Kelley's works also reflect his troubled childhood, which included father abuse. (Welchman 1999, 42-93)

The issue of teddy bears in fine art also replays the 1980s debates regarding art and commodification. Kelley plays on the gift nature of homemade toys, as being outside the traditional realm of commodities and consumerism. The stuffed toys in his 'Craftmorphology' series 1991, for example, as craft objects also deconstruct the gallery as the site of fine art. (Welchman, Graw, & Vidler, 1999) Sawaragi also refers to how teddy bears now trespass in the art gallery. (Sawaragi 2001b, 96-103) In 1986 Haim Steinbach's *Basics* 1986 featured three teddy bears, and rather than a study of 'the typological genealogy of objects in order to put together a lost history of a specific society or culture,' they are 'reflexive of a contemporary, culturally mixed, social reality.' (Haim Steinbach quoted in Budney 1996, 88) Steinbach's work 'deals with breaking the boundaries between ideologically constructed worlds of categorical hierarchies of objects.' (Haim Steinbach quoted in Budney 1996, 88)

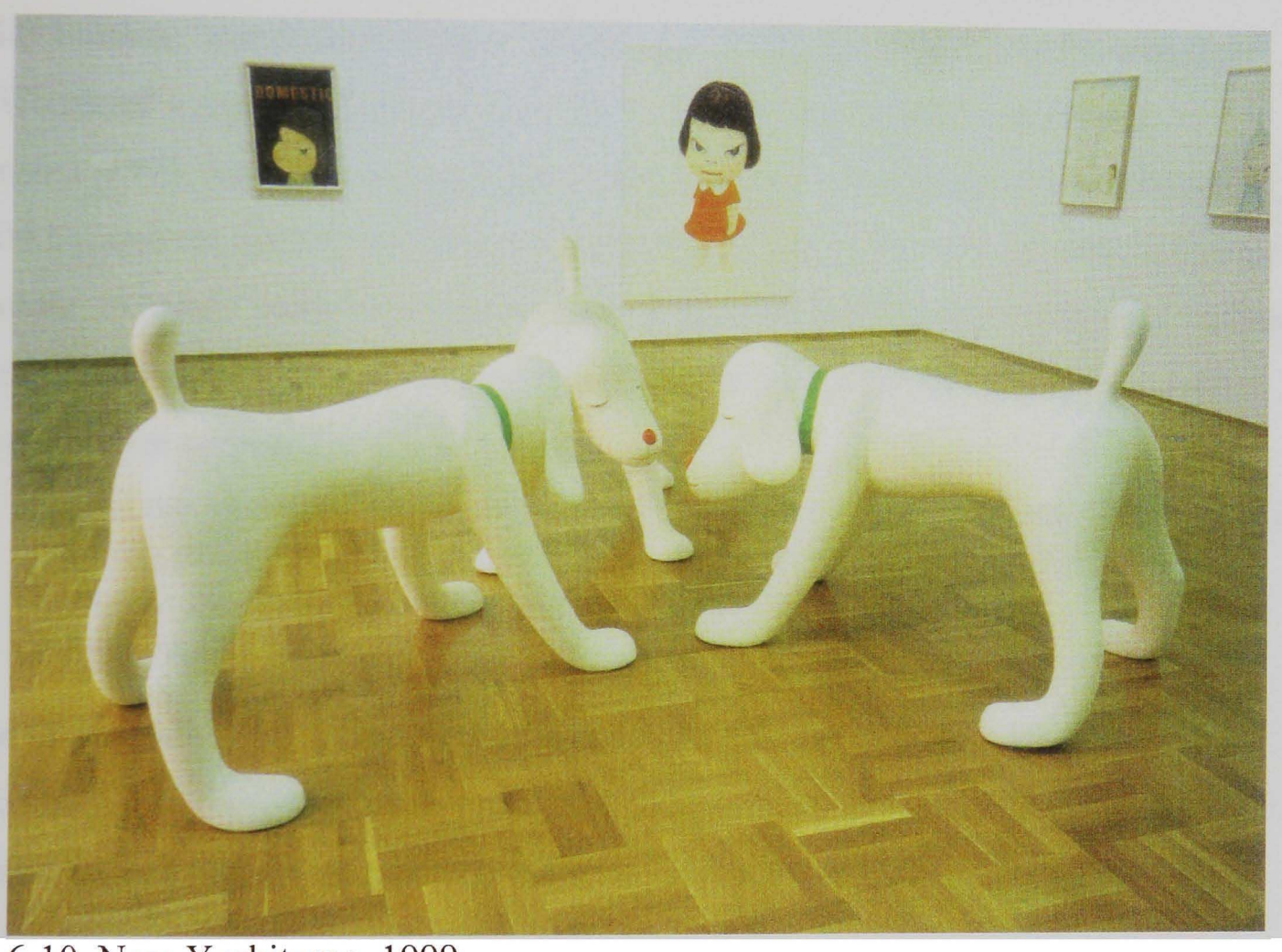
Nara's frequent inclusion of dogs and puppies, such as *Dog From Your Childhood* 1997, (Ill.6-9) and *Dogs From Your Childhood* 1999, (Ill.6-10) for example, and his *manga* like style, have lead to comparisons with the swollen heads of the characters in Charles M. Schulz's *Peanuts*, in which the small white beagle *Snoopy* plays a central role, and the *Tin Tin* comic series, which features another small white dog *Snowy*. (Trescher 2001) Nara explains his choice of dogs in particular.

> To a certain extent pets are like humans, cats less so, dogs all the more. Therefore I can use them as symbols, and the dog works the best. It is in need of protection, dependent on its master, but has its own will and can be clever as well. (Nara quoted in Trescher 2001b, 105)

Three Dogs from Your Childhood 1999 is an installation of three identical five feet tall puppies circling an empty dog dish which they are unable to reach since they stand on two feet tall wooden stilts, based loosely on traditional wooden *geta* or sandals. Their height also forces the viewer to take the child's eye view.

Nara Yoshitomo's exhibition titles also often evoke a cuteness that highlights nostalgia for a childhood past, 'Innocent Being' in 1988, 'Lonesome Puppy' in 1996/7, 'Screen

6-9. Nara Yoshitomo, 1997
Dog From Your Childhood
Fiberglass, wood, resin and lacquer
38 x 43 x 47.5 cm
From Rothenburger (ed.) 2001, 39



6-10. Nara Yoshitomo, 1999
Dogs From Your Childhood
Fiberglass, resin, lacquer
92 x 152 x 101 cm
From Rothenburger (ed.) 2001, 135

Memory' in 1997, 'I Don't Mind If You Forget Me' in 2001, for example. Cuteness is tied to childhood memory but rather than that idealised version that is often represented, Nara's images work to deconstruct this image through their inclusion of trauma and sadness. The bandages on a child's head in *In The Deepest Puddle II* 1995, or *Mumps* 1996 pitifully evoke some tragedy that might have happened. Nara's exhibition 'Screen Memory' refers to the psychoanalytic term for shielding the mind from difficult or painful memories. (Murakami and Nara 2001, 129-144) For Nara one such memory involves having abandoned his dog as a child, the trauma of which he says was only disclosed to him by his art. (Schaffner 2003, 59)

In Nara's exhibition statement 'I don't mind if you forget me', Sawaragi, taking the 'you' as representing each visitor to the exhibition, and the 'I' as their own childhood, refers to the teddy bears as 'transitional objects.' (Sawaragi 2001b, 96-103) Using the term from D.W. Winnicott's psychoanalytical essay 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena' 1971. Sawaragi argues Nara's phrase is about loosing partof yourself when the child became the adult that is you, now. (Sawaragi 2001b, 96-103) In order to change from 'child' to 'adult' teddy bears, security blankets, comforters and soothers, the various forms of the transitional object, are essential tools, but no matter how much they were loved, children at some point abandon them.

> It is not the object, of course, that is transitional. The object represents the infant's transition from a state of being merged with the mother to a state of being in relation to the mother as something outside and separate.
> (Winnicott 1971, 14)

The use of the transitional object helps the child to make the transition out of the magic world of fantasies towards an acceptance of reality. Like Nara's references to dreams, his use of transitional objects represents something in between the real and the imagined.

The transitional object is neither an internal object, a purely mental concept, nor a completely external object. According to Winnicott, the transitional object is on the one hand part of the creative imagination, but also part of external reality. It is, he argues, part of the 'transitional sphere', the overlap of inner subjective and outer objective reality.

> This intermediate area of experience, unchallenged in respect of its belonging to inner or external (shared) reality, constitutes the greater part of the infant's experience, and throughout life is retained in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work.'
> (Winnicott 1971, 14)

This dual aspect of the transitional object resonates with Nara's works, and also with the wider issue regarding the popularity of cute characters in Japan.

For Winnicott the transitional object is the first not-me possession. The teddy bear or the piece of blanket. Winnicott states 'is symbolic of some part-object, such as the breast.' (Winnicott 1971, 6) The transitional object is a reference to the possibility of the return of the mother. While the transitional object, often a soft toy or blanket, has some qualities of the mother such as warmth or texture, at the same time the child as owner, can manipulate the transitional object, and in doing so, can keep enough feelings of power not to feel completely helpless. According to Winnicott's concept, in the absence of the mother, the transitional object gives the child the actual experience of being mothered and of not being helpless. It is essential, Winnicott argues, that the transitional object has actuality and gives a real experience of mothering. Nevertheless, he argues,

> the point of it is not its symbolic value so much as its actuality. Its not being the breast (or the mother), although real, is as important as the fact that it stands for the breast (or mother). (Winnicott 1971, 6)

The true transitional object is 'more important than the mother, an almost inseparable part of the infant.' (Winnicott 1971, 7) It may, he argues, eventually develop into a fetish object and so persist as a characteristic of the adult sexual life.

The presence of aggression, and violence in Nara's works also recalls Winnicott's theory. One of the qualities of the transitional object, Winnicott states, is that it must survive hate and aggression. By learning to function on the level of symbolization, the child also learns to deal with 'bad objects', with 'evil'. In the play of the imagination, aggression against the perceived 'bad' aspects of the self or of the environment can be directed towards the transitional object. When the child feels 'bad' it can make the teddy bear 'bad' and give him the deserved punishment. When the child feels frustrated by the parents and is angry, the teddy bear can be the receiver, the 'holder' of that aggression. This expression of anger and aggression on a symbolic level can give a real experience of relief, explains Winnicott. The transitional object must survive instinctive loving and hating, and, if it happens to be a feature, also pure aggression. (Winnicott 1971)

Children often see characters as imaginary friends and a reliable source of support.

Nobita's *Doraemon*, Christopher Robin's *Winnie the Pooh* and Calvin's tiger *Hobbes* are good examples of this. In *Doraemon*, Nobi Nobita is a ten-year-old boy constantly being helped out of trouble by *Doraemon* whose job it is to save Nobita from a future of poverty and failure. In Fujiko's fantasy world *Doraemon*'s *takekoputâ* (bamboo-copter), which is based on an old fashioned flying toy made from bamboo, even allows Nobita to fly. The continued attachment of adults to these characters, even into their twenties and thirties, argues Winnicott, is a reflection of the uncertainty of today's social environment. 'The subject of nostalgia comes into the picture: it belongs to the precarious hold that a person may have on the inner representation of a lost object.' (Winnicott 1971, 23) Sawaragi argues Nara's paintings act like a kind of intermediary bringing together the separated inner and outer child. In the 'I don't mind if you forget me' exhibition, as you walk through abandoned bears in the 'your childhood' series, he argues, it is possible to meet your lost self one more time. When we come into contact with Nara's works in the art gallery, we become absorbed because we revisit memories, and traumas. (Sawaragi 2001b, 96-103)

What happens to the teddy bear once the transition to adulthood has been made? Winnicott states that the fate of the transitional object is to be 'gradually allowed to be decathected, so that in the course of years it becomes not so much forgotten as relegated to limbo.' (Winnicott 1971, 5) In the case of a healthy child the transitional object is not internalised nor does the feeling about it necessarily undergo repression. It is not forgotten and it is not mourned. It loses meaning, and this is because the transitional phenomena have become diffused, have become spread out over the whole intermediate territory between 'inner psychic reality' and 'the external world as perceived by two persons in common', that is to say over the whole cultural field. (Winnicott 1971, 5)

Sawaragi questions whether in Nara's case the transitional object performed its function successfully. (Sawaragi 2001b, 96-103) A photo of Nara's desk littered with coloured pencils, stuffed toys and cute pictures leads Sawaragi to ask whether Nara managed to throw his teddy bear away. (Ill.6-11) A photo of Murakami's desk is similarly scattered with cute pictures and toys (Ill.6-12) Sawaragi argues that this situation reflects the condition of Japan as a whole, and that Japan is a society overwhelmed with 'transitional

6-11. Nara Yoshitomo's desk, Cologne, 2000
From Rothenburger (ed.) 2001, 46

6-12. Murakami Takashi's desk, 1999
From Murakami 1999, n.p

objects'. Citing the cute characters that feature on bankcards, and even appear on election posters, old men in trains with kittens on their bag straps, cute smiling pocket monsters 10,000 meters up in the sky painted onto the side of All Nippon Airways Boeing 747s, Sawaragi argues, Japan is in the condition of not being able to fully become adult, and concludes that the disturbance of the line between 'adult' and 'child' in Japan needs to urgently recover before society collapses. (Sawaragi 2001b, 96-103)

In Nara's retrospective exhibition 'Yoshitomo Nara: From the Depths of My Drawer' at Hara Museum of Contemporary Art in 2004, Nara wrote in the forward to the exhibition 'Facing the past, I feel I should be able to find some hints as to what my future direction should be.' (Nara quoted in Miyaki 2004, 13)

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the importance of nostalgia in Japanese popular culture and shown how Nara's work attempts a deconstruction of this, showing it as an idealised past. By including the elements we choose to forget, his work represents an uncovering, quite similar to the psychoanalytical process mapped out by Winnicott. There is a similarity of Nara's images to those of Mike Kelley, but Nara is less distressed, and more focussed on the cute. The cuteness that drives this nostalgic process, also an idealised vision, is subverted by a violent, or disturbing element that reveals traumas, on an individual level, but also at the level of the social body, and suggests the possibility of a connection with the trauma of World War II.

Chapter 7 Virtual Cuteness

This chapter, through the works of Mori Mariko and Murakami Takashi, examines the relation of cuteness and technology, and the proliferation of cuteness in the virtual world of cyberspace.

> With play products such as Pokemon, Japan's cultural industries have touched a pulse in the imaginations and lives of millennial children in this era of cyber technology and postindustrial socialization. They have done this by blending flexibility and fantasy into technology that is conveniently portable, virtuality that is intimately cute, and a commodity form that is polymorphously perverse. (Allison 2004, 47)

Virtual pets such as Bandai's *Tamogotchi*, and Sony's *PostPet* incorporate what Brian McVeigh refers to as 'techno cuteness' (McVeigh 2003, 26), while the commuter space has produced its own culture, which has been changing from *manga* reading to interacting with portable screens. Murakami's exhibition 'Takashi Murakami: summon monsters? open the door? heal? or die?' at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, takes its title from the commands of a computer role-playing game. (Murakami 2001c, 143) From playing with mobile phones (downloading from the internet, playing games, and sending emails), to *tamagotchis* and gameboys, the increased importance of interaction with screens resonates with Murakami's theory of the Super Flat, and a postmodern sense of loss of depth.

During the early 1990s there was a shift towards computer games, games and their characters becoming as important as *manga* as sources for *anime* productions. (Morikawa 2003) Shinoda Masashiro also argues the recent rise of game characters is a significant development. (Shinoda 2000, 54) *Pokemon*, whose game graphics are comparatively simple, was first created as Game Boy software in the late 1990s, and later appeared as a serial *manga* in *Koro Koro*, a monthly magazine, followed by cards, TV series, films, and merchandise.

> In Pocket Monster animation one can see the accumulation of over 50 years of Japanese animation culture being adopted into game, creating an original form of expression. No one has seriously examined the cultural background of those products. (Murakami 2000, 41)

This chapter, through the artworks and interviews with the artists, aims to examine how contemporary art has commented on and provided insights to this aspect of contemporary Japanese culture.

Joseph Tobin suggests *otaku* are ideal consuming subjects constructed by late capitalism, (Tobin 2004, 281) while Yano also argues the core practises of *otaku* are anti-social behaviour centring on consumption. (Yano 2004, 130) William O. Gardner's study of Japanese fighting girl games and the writings on *otaku* of Saitô Tamaki, question why the image of the adolescent female warrior has resonated so strongly in post-war Japanese popular culture, to whose gaze is the warrior girl's combination of sexual innocence addressed, and what are the cultural and social consequences of this sexualized imagery? (Gardner 2003, n.p.) Are *otaku* simply a social stereotype, or, as Murakami Takashi argues, are they a genuine cultural force, harbingers of a more savvy, creative consumer in a media-saturated society?

Moreover, cuteness is a key aesthetic with regard to robots and the android/human divide, especially with regards to the feeling of empathy that it induces. Murakami, also links cuteness, explicitly to the atomic bombs in his *Time bokan* (Time *kaboom*) series, while in the post apocalypse of many science fiction *anime*, cuteness is associated with a childlike innocence and the birth of a new life.

Play with Me

Play With Me 1994 situates Mori Mariko in Akihabara, an area of Tokyo famous for cheap electrical goods. (Ill.7-1) It is an area that was at that time experiencing a shift in emphasis on the consumer goods on offer, from hardware to software – software that represents a new virtual world of cyberspace, a world inhabited by *otaku* and their favourite animated computer game characters.

> Starting from the 1980s, Akihabara lost its market to suburban volume-sales outlets, leaving little choice but to move from appliances to personal computers. The shift was accompanied by a marked change toward computer consumers, who differed not only in age and occupation but also in more specific social affiliation. In those days before Windows or the internet, computer users were typically professionals or hobbyists who enjoyed computing, (Morikawa 2004, 22)

Although computer games and *ero manga* were already around in the early 1990s in Akihabara, it had yet to become the '*otaku* town' that it is today. (Morikawa 2003, 57)

7-1. Mori Mariko, 1994
Play With Me
Fuji super gloss (duraflex) print, wood, pewter frame
305 x 366 x 7.6 cm
American Fine Arts Co., New York

7-2. Bome, 1997
Rei: Death and Rebirth
Model figure
From *Bishôjo figa sûpâ korekshion* 1999, 29
Tokyo: Media Works

Morikawa Kaichirô's study traces the history of Akihabara, and sites two main causes behind the formation of Akihabara electric town: an electrical appliance manufacturing college near by; and a crack down on street stalls in 1949 by Occupation forces, forcing them into department stores around Akihabara station. In the post-war consumer electronics boom, TVs, fridges, and washing machines were referred to as the 'three sacred treasures'. Akihabara became a testing ground for new products, supported by many major manufacturers, and often receiving extra discounts. (Morikawa 2003, 67)

In my interview with Mori, I asked her about the *otaku* boom in Akihabara. Up until 1994, Mori had been living in London and New York for over five years.

> [I]t really symbolised the culture at the time, how people were communicating through technology, but by themselves not with each other, only with the technology. (Mori interview 2004)

This is a point Mori had made previously in an interview with Fujimori Manami where she also referred to the effect of seeing *anime* shops in New York, and meeting people who were interested in Japan. (Fujimori 1995, 50-55)

Mori is right on the cusp, just before games take off with PCs and improved graphics, and the massive success of Anno Hideaki's television *anime* series *Shin Seiki Evangelion* (Neon Genesis Evangelion) in 1995. The release of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* brought a subculture boom. A figurine of Ayanami Rei, by Bome, shows one of the most popular characters from the series (Ill.7-2) Model figures became increasingly popular, and Kaiyôdô, the figurine manufacturer, began manufacturing editions in thousands, rather than the usual hundreds. Kaiyôdô moved from Shibuya to Akihabara in 1997, having discovered that *otaku* were going to Akihabara to buy laser discs, and then on to Jinbôchô to buy *dôjinshi* (independent *manga*). (Morikawa 2003, 58) By moving to Akihabara everything was brought together.

In Play with Me Mori stands next to an arcade version of *Sonic the Hedgehog* 3, a 1993 up-dated version of the original *Sonic the Hedgehog*, the flagship character and mascot for the computer game company Sega. Designed by Ôshima Naoto, *Sonic* is a blue, fifteen-year-old hedgehog with the ability to run at supersonic speeds. (Ill.7-3) The screen shows the small, checkered planet from the special stage of the game. (Ill.7-4) In the game *Sonic* must collect Golden Rings, to protect himself from the robots, and Chaos Emeralds in

order to take on his most powerful form, *Super Sonic*, and prevent Doctor Ivo Robotnik, who is trying to take over the world by turning animals into robots.

Mori's works have been associated with kitsch and the superficial: 'the hi-tech apotheosis of the "banality" embraced by Jeff Koons' (Sand 1999, 23); 'In Mori all the cyborgs are as sweet and harmless as *Hello Kitty*.' (Bryson 1998, 79) Mori herself states:

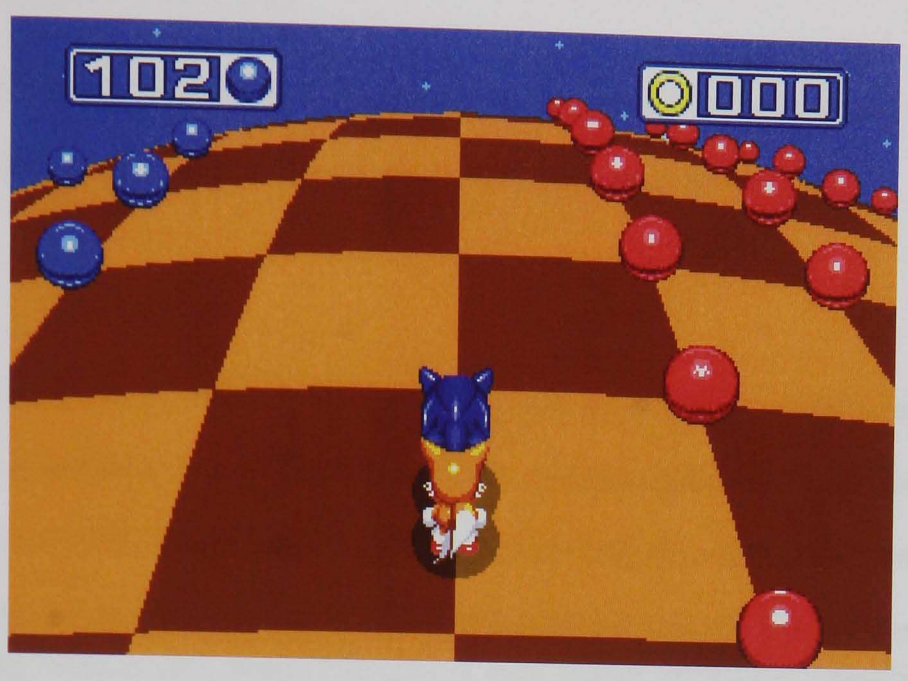
> We're all the children of Andy Warhol, and grandchildren of Duchamp. It was consumerism that created kitsch. Our cyborg pop idols have to be kitsch, because they have to be reproducible. (Mori quoted in Schwabsky 1997, 19)

Molon suggests that there is a 'plexiglass shell of irony' in Mori's works. (Molon 1998, 8)

Mori appears in her fantastic costume 'like a character who has just stepped out of an animated film or computer game.' (Shioda 1998, 79) It is a computer game fantasy come true. The costume is reminiscent of Chun Li, who, in the game *Street Fighter II*, was special agent for the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol), and is still a favourite character for *kosupure* (costume play) fans. (Ill.7-5) In the mid-1980s one-on-one fighting games were in their infancy, restricted by the limitations of technology, but the release of *Street Fighter II* in 1991 by Capcom, was a major breakthrough. Players could choose from eight characters, each with different looks and moves. According to the book *All About Capcom*, which explains the official *Street Fighter* plot in detail, Chun-Li's story begins in *Street Fighter Alpha 2*, where she is trying to find her father, who had gone missing on assignment. (Capcom 2003)

Mori's work combines the two central motifs in Japanese *anime – bishôjo* (beautiful young girls) and robots, and questions the state of chaos of a synthetic reality where fantasy coexists with reality. Christine Yano suggests while *otaku* know the difference between the real world and the virtual, their preference is for the world of virtual reality. (Yano 2004, 130) During the work *Play With Me*, which was made outside a *famicon* (family computer) software shop, there was no reaction from the customers. (Fujimori 1995, 50-55) Mori performs a cultural-materialist analysis of how the social imaginary actually operates.

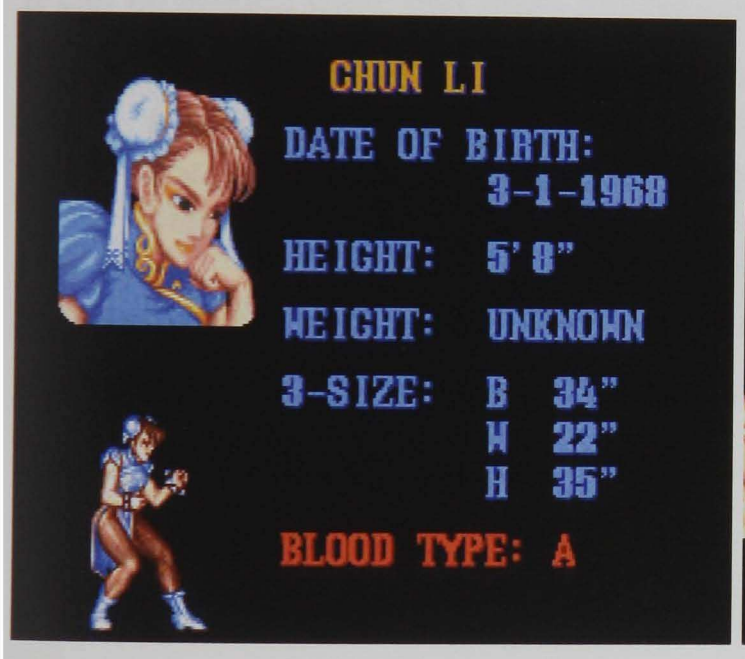
> Mori playfully explores the accelerated pace and psyche of Japanese culture at the end of the twentieth century. It is a culture of fascinating contradictions, at once formal, deeply traditional, and shockingly progressive. And it is a culture, concedes Mori, that readily embraces the latest trends in technology – from computers to



7-3. Sega, 1993
Sonic the Hedgehog

7-4. Sega, 1993
Sonic the Hedgehog 3 screen shot

Both from http://www.mobygames.com/game/shots/p,15/gameId,6239/gameShotId,32807/
(Accessed September 2004)



7-5. Capcom, 1991
Street Fighter II screen shots
From http://www.mobygames.com/game/shots/p,15/gameId,6239/gameShotId,32807/
(Accessed September 2004)

> video games to virtual reality – but does not question the fantasies and future technology creates. (Weaver 1997, 37)

Although 'fantastical and fun-loving', Mori's cyborgs embody issues of social and moral importance as well. They 'speak metaphorically of the woman's role in Japan.' (Kumamoto 1995, 4)

In *Love Hotel* 1994, (Ill.7-6) an android in a love hotel dressed in a typical Japanese school uniform, 'presents herself as a seductive yet distant – even impenetrable – sex kitten.' (Eliel 1998, 28) In my interview with Mori she explains her motivation for this work.

> At the time I was really interested in the social issues of a culture. There were many high school kids dating with older men, I found it was quite an awful situation, and so I wanted to criticise that aspect of society. In order to express that I wanted to put in a cyborg rather than a real human, it's metaphorical of the human being like a robot, or treated like a robot, or being treated like a doll. So it was a kind of metaphor for the social structure, and my criticism of this social issue. (Mori interview 2004)

It can be argued then, that Mori's works reflect a male centred social condition.

> These works grow directly out of their respective social milieux, as components of a corporate, urban, salary-man centered imaginary that is as much a part of the real social fabric as Japan's transport system, its corporate architecture, or its workplace hierarchy. (Bryson 1998, 77)

As Norman Bryson argues, a part from the social actuality of the male-dominated corporations, there are also the fantasies which, arising from these specific milieux, work to keep the dominant forms of subjectivity lubricated and turning in their designated social slots. (Bryson 1998, 77)

With Konami's release of *Tokimeki Memorial* for the Playstation in 1995, *bishôjo* games broke into the mainstream. *Tokimeki Memorial* was a *dating sim* (the small subgenre of *bishôjo* games specifically focused on dating) featuring good graphics, full voice acting, and a role-playing gameplay system, and sold over a million copies. In order to be accessible to a mainstream audience it contained no erotic elements, seeking instead to create a 'romantic' atmosphere. (Yukino 2000, n.p.)

Bishôjo games began appearing in Japan in the very earliest days of personal computing. One of the first *bishôjo* games was *Night Life* by Kôei in 1982. Nearly all the early games in the genre were pornographic. The first *bishôjo* games were not widely popular, being

7-6. Mori Mariko, 1994
Love Hotel
C-print
122 x 152 x 5 cm
From *Parkett* no.54 1998/99, p95

limited to graphics of sixteen colors or less. (Yukino 2000, n.p.) A notable landmark was *Tenshitachi no gogo* 1985, a precursor to the modern *ren'ai* game, and the first to have recognizably modern *anime*-style artwork; its characters were cute and had very large eyes. *Bishôjo* games for the PC are generally sold in special stores or sections of stores reserved for customers eighteen years old or above. However, console *bishôjo* games, which are less explicit, are sold alongside regular video games.

Ren'ai describes adventure games focusing on romantic interactions with *anime* girls. This term is generally used to describe games which have little or no pornography, or for which erotic content is not the main focus of the game. Elf's *Dôkyûsei* (*Classmates*) 1992 established the standard conventions of the *ren'ai* game genre. (Yukino 2000, n.p.) In a typical *ren'ai* game, the player controls a male character surrounded by girls. The game involves conversing and attempting to increase the girls' internal 'love meter' through correct choices of dialogue. The game, which lasts for the duration of one school year, ends with the player either losing the game if he failed to win over any of the girls, or 'finishes' one of the girls, either by having sex with her or achieving eternal love.

Bishôjo games involving elements of forcing and brutality came to national attention in Japan in 1986 with the release by dB-soft of *177*, a game where the player takes the role of a rapist. The game's title originates from the number of the Japanese law criminalizing rape. *177* was not the first game designed around this premise, but it was unusually explicit, causing debate in the Japanese parliament, and eventually being recalled and re-released with the most controversial scenes removed. (Yukino 2000, n.p.)

Bishôjo games almost always involve images of *anime* girls, rather than photographs of real-life girls. A*nime* girls were better suited to computer screens in the early days when colours were limited, and using *anime* allows hardcore *bishôjo* game studios to circumvent Japanese child pornography laws, which ban only pictures of real-life minors, not simulations. These images also played to *otaku*'s preference for *anime* girls over real-life ones. In fact throughout the 1990s *bishôjo* games underwent an evolution from being one of the most technologically demanding types of games (because their detailed two-dimensional graphics required a large amount of storage space by the standards of early computers) to one of the least (they rarely use three-dimensional graphics). The great majority of *bishôjo* games remain two-dimensional even today, in contrast to the rest of the

gaming industry, which has largely moved to more realistic three-dimensional images. *Tokimeki Memorial 3* 2001 was the first *bishôjo* game to have all its characters in 3D, but suffered poor sales. Thus, more than regular games, the main employees required by *bishôjo* game companies today are not programmers but artists and writers. (Yukino 2000, n.p.)

The *bishôjo* game industry is tightly linked with the Japanese *anime* and *manga* industry. They share many of the same conventions, and many popular games have been converted to *anime* and *manga*, and many games are spin offs of *bishôjo anime*. The three industries draw on the same pool of talent, the Japanese *dôjinshi* community, and the same core base of repeat customers, *otaku*. Many *dôjinshi* groups produce *bishôjo* games, many with the goal of later forming a company or being hired by one of the big names in the industry. New companies appear every year, but in order to survive companies need to be either much better than their competitors, or cater to a niche market. This explains the continuing production of hardcore *bishôjo* games despite the much smaller market for these games.

Moe, the *otaku* element of cuteness discussed in chapter 4, is a sought-after characteristic in a *bishôjo* game character. The intended appeal of such characters is not always explicitly sexual; the idea is to present a cute, lovable character who is dependent on, and supported by the player. Two particularly common characters are schoolgirls and maids. The latter often based on a medieval, pseudo-European image also referred to as to Gothic Lolita style. The majority of *bishôjo* games involve girls ranging from fourteen to seventeen years of age. Besides looking young, they also often act young; their voices are high-pitched, and they sometimes throw childish temper tantrums.

Azuma Hiroki argues *otaku* characters went through a change in the latter half of the 1990s, with the story behind a character becoming less important as the character's design became paramount. (Azuma 2001b, 64) Using *Dejiko* as an example Azuma points out as important features, her bell, maid's uniform, and *nekomimi* (cat's ears). (Ill.7) When she gets angry her eyes radiate deadly beams. *Shisui House* is another example, and linked to the *dôjin* scene. *Meinyan*, their mascot, is a maid with *nekomimi*. Now there are countless websites like this, one example is *Nyan nyan tower*, (Ill.7-8) but in 1997 *Shisui House*

『デ・ジ・キャラット』 制作／ブロッコリー

7-7.*Digi Charat*, 1998
From Azuma 2001b, 66

7-8. *Nyan nyan tower*, 2003
Screen shot

7-9. *Konekodômei* (Kitten alliance), 2004
Computer game advertising flier
CD Bros Inc.

was a pioneer. The cuteness provides a vulnerability that *otaku* demand. Another reason cuteness becomes important is because in these computer games the user himself becomes a character in the game and so, Azuma argues, there needs to be a comparatively high level of empathy (*kanjyôinyû*) for the characters in the game. (Azuma 2001b)

In Mori's *Love Hotel*, the jacket hanging on the wall is the only visible evidence of a male's presence, and in this respect shows a similarity to sex and dating simulation computer games, where the male character representing the player is almost never seen. Male characters rarely appear on the screen, and when they do it is usually with their face off screen or otherwise hidden. While Mori has spoken of her concern for the real life practice of *enjo kôsai*, pointing to the treatment of women like robots, the scene in *Love Hotel* is also very similar to a typical one in this genre of sex simulation game. That Mori is dressed as an android figure adds to this.

Raiser sim is a subgenre where the goal is to 'raise' a female character, training and educating her. A classic example is *Princess Maker*. Many hardcore *bishôjo* games also start from this premise, in which case the character to be 'raised' is usually some kind of sexual slave. (Yukino 2000, n.p.) 'Sex simulation' and 'sex adventure' games, such as *Plastic Honeymoon* released by D.O. Games in 2001, which features Claris an experimental maid robot from the Dream Robot Company, is set in the future when advanced robotic technology has enabled androids which are indiscernible from humans to be built. They look after old people, act as maids or provide a companion for someone lonely or a couple who can't have children. Claris has had no input; there is no data in her memory. In the game the player teaches her to become the woman of his dreams. *Konekodômei* (kitten alliance) is another typical example of this kind of cute girl sex training game. (Ill.7-9)

Screens

In Akihabara *manga* and *anime* characters appear on signboards, life sized posters and figures line up outside the shop fronts, and appear on huge LCD screens attached to the sides of buildings. (Ill.7-10) On the roof of *Gamers*, also known as '*Dejiko* building', printed on a billboard is the face of the cute young girl TV *anime* character *Dejiko*. At the

7-10. Akihabara, 2004
Photo the author

7-11. *109* Shibuya Department Store, 2004
Photo the author

Akihabara JR station ticket barrier there are special adverts for beautiful girl video *anime* games, and a mass of kitsch icons. Akihabara resembles an internet site, Morikawa argues, with advertising and bulletin boards acting like site links. (Morikawa 2003, 69) Small 'communities of interest', become important. In Akihabara the private room has extended into public space.

The big screens increasingly attached to buildings in Tokyo represent, according to Vladimir Krstic, 'the final dissolution of urban space', constitute 'the rupture of the vanishing point', and the dissolution of architectural volume. (Krstic 1997, 39) (Ill.7-11) Paul Virilio also argues that we increasingly rely on an architecture based on looking at computer screens rather than out of windows, and this adds up to a loss of dimension, 'devoid of spatial dimensions, but inscribed in the singular temporality of an instantaneous diffusion.' (Virilio 1991, 13) The depth of physical distance is supplanted by the instantaneous time of electronic transmission, and crucially for Virilio, this also means the loss of any kind of critical space within which one might find positions of difference or critique. In this new world order characterized by the loss of a dimension, Mori springs forth from cyberspace, 'physical depth switches off, to be replaced by a micron-thin electronic screen.' (Cohen 1997, 96)

> Postmodern humans experience themselves as surface phenomena without depth and experience their interactions with each other as occurring without distance, as if all life were reduced to immediacy and the flat surface of the pervasive computer or television screen. (Springer 1996, 43)

This recalls Murakami's Superflat manifesto where he likens the Superflat experience to the merging of flat layers in the creation of a desktop graphic on a personal computer. (Murakami 2000a, 5)

Considering the transformations in *anime* worlds and their consumption, Azuma writes of a shift from an 'arboreal world' to a 'data-basic world.' (Azuma 2001b, 50-53) He argues that the database becomes the underlying structure that consumers 'enter' or 'read into.' Similarly Thomas Looser states we are in a transitional moment, experiencing a shift from the cinematic to the 'animeic', and argues Azuma and Murakami make the same general claims about the Superflat surface and *anime*, that others do of digital production. (Looser 2002, 297-327) The Superflat emphasis on identity as a surface relation, between non-hierarchised and non-narrativised elements on the surface, rejects any possibility of a

single-perspective painting or space. (Looser 2002, 310) In this way *anime* is situated in relation to the emergence of something new – the postmodern, the post-human, the post-national and, more recently, the digital new media.

Murakami's theory of Super Flat coincides with the postmodern depthlessness exemplified by the flatness of the TV and computer screen, and described by Baudrillard in his essay 'The Ecstasy of Communication'.

> Today the screen and mirror have given way to a screen and network. There is no longer any transcendence or depth, but only the immanent surface of operations unfolding, the smooth and functional surface of communication. In the image of television, the most beautiful prototypical object of this new era, the surrounding universe and our very bodies are becoming monitoring screens. (Baudrillard 1998, 12)

Baudrillard argues that we no longer exist as individuals but as terminals of multiple networks. In postmodernism the distinction between interior and exterior has blurred, and much of *anime* seems to be questioning how, under these new conditions, one might go about the process of locating identity, and what human identity itself might be.

Baudrillard asserts that the psychological depth explored and analysed by Freud no longer characterises the late 20th century.

> We lived once in a world where the realm of the imaginary was governed by the mirror, by dividing one into two, by theatre, by otherness and alienation. Today that realm is the realm of the screen, of interfaces and duplication, of contiguity and networks. All our machines are screens, and the interactivity of humans has been replaced by the interactivity of screens.
> (Baudrillard 1993, 54)

In the clutter of commodified postmodern space, we tend to skim the surface rather than explore meaningful depths.

> Rather than a resolution of these different layers, the idea is to maintain a sense of difference, or different surfaces of identity, but with all these different layers coexisting on the same plane (as on the computer screen).
> (Looser 2002, 309)

Murakami's definition of the Superflat in his Superflat manifesto and the analogy with the merging of layers in the creation of a computer image corresponds closely to these theories of the postmodern (Murakami 2000a, 5), and offers insight into Mori's works.

The issue of interpersonal communication skills deficiency comes up time and again with respect to *otaku*. Morikawa refers to the derogatory term '2-D complex', claiming enough

people seem to have it to make it valid (Morikawa 2003, 93), while McVeigh argues that intense interiority has been encouraged by technology, and that there has been a reaction to the pressures of too much individualization. (McVeigh 2003, 26) Baudrillard, in a statement which it seems could also be describing classic *otaku* 'symptoms', states that

> This withdrawal, which we know well, is that of the subject for whom the sexual and social horizons of others has disappeared, and whose mental horizon has been reduced to the manipulation of his images and screens. (Baudrillard 1998, 43)

Otaku give up real women for these two dimensional images of cuteness. 'Among *anime* and *manga* fans perhaps the most accurate description of *rorikon* is that it involves a preference for two dimensional images over reality.' (Schodt 1983, 230) Setsu Shigematsu argues that the fetishization of cuteness in *rorikon* is a substitute, it replaces a lack of desire for the 'real thing' – a lack of desire that young men are 'naturally' supposed to possess for real young women. (Setsu 1999, 132) Aida states that he is 'more interested in two dimensional expressions of sexuality', and in 'secondary means of consuming or disseminating sexuality.' (Aida quoted in Lloyd and Roberts 2001, 37)

For Baudrillard we have entered into a new form of schizophrenia. The schizophrenic is not characterized by his loss of touch with reality, but by the 'absolute proximity, the total instantaneity of things', and the overexposure and transparency of the world. (Baudrillard 1983b. 133) The schizophrenic can no longer 'produce the limits of his own being', he can no longer 'produce himself as a mirror. He is now only a pure screen, a switching center for all the networks of influence.' (Baudrillard 1983b, 133) This issue of postmodern schizophrenia, which has already been examined in chapter 6, is also characteristic of *otaku*.

Otaku are also characterised by a new type of solitude. Ayanami Rei, the character from the TV *anime* series *Neon Genesis Evangelion* 1995 is the 'First Child', genetically engineered by the Human Complementation Project. (Ill.7-12) She is the pilot of Evangelion Unit-00 in the fight against the invading 'angels'. Designed by Yoshiyuki Sadamoto, although Anno specified her age, blood type and personality, her name comes from Murakami Ryû's novel *Ai to Gensô no Fashizumu* (The Fascism of Love and Fantasy). (Broderick 1998) Azuma argues that Rei represents a new type of solitude. Up until that point there had been two dominant types of children's solitude: *kogyaru* and *otaku* in Japanese intellectual discourse. Both are characteristic for their dependence on

7-12.Anno Hideaki, 1995
Neon Genesis Evangelion DVD cover 1997
Gainax

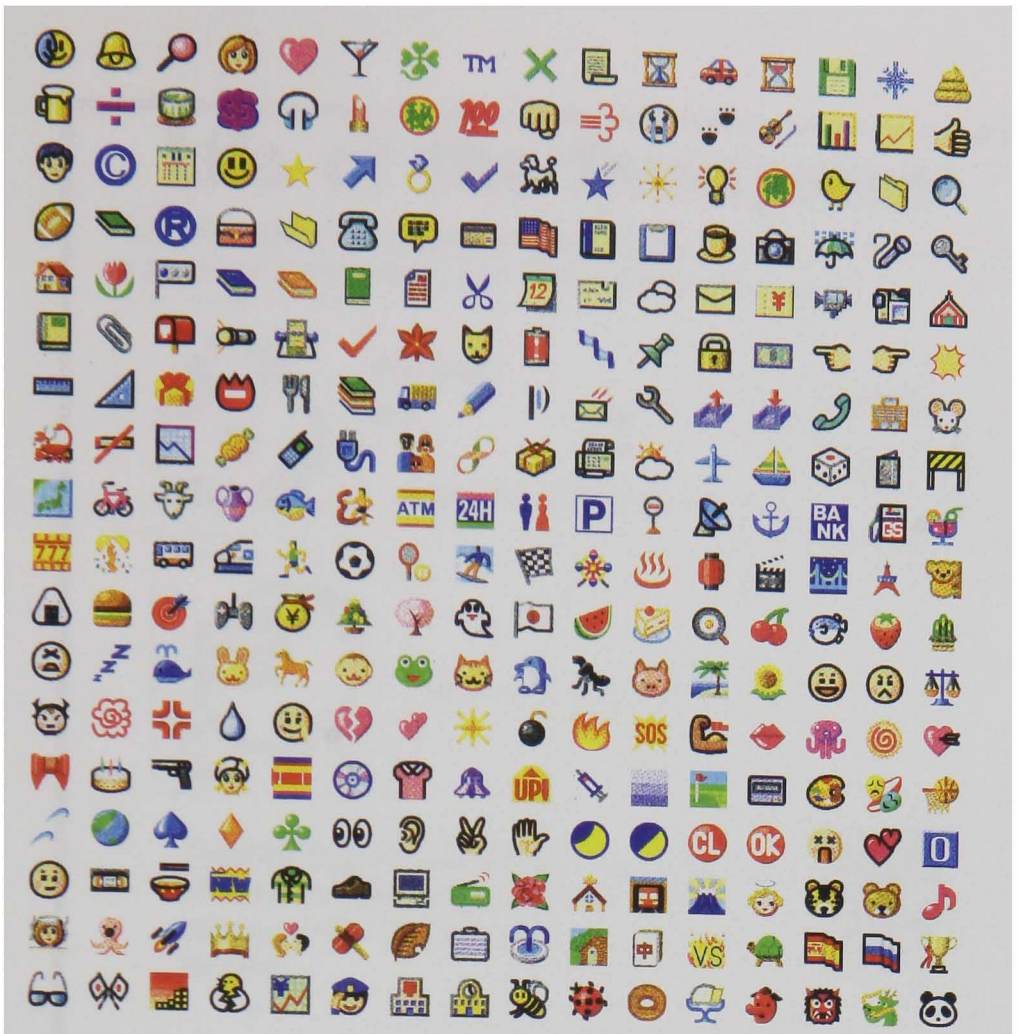
7-13. Mori Mariko, 1994
Red Light
Duraflex print, wood, pewter frame
365.8 x 304.8 x 7.6 cm
From *Parkett* no.54 1998/99, p96

media-networks: *kogyaru* use telephones to find their customers, while *otaku* fill their room with computer software, videos, or DVDs. (Broderick 1998, n.p.)

Mori's *Red Light* 1994 captures an android using her mobile phone in the Shinjuku red-light district *Kabukichô*. (Ill.7-13) The phone suggests that she might be arranging a *deai-kai* or 'type of encounter.' (Holden and Tsuruki 2003, 34) *Deai-kai* usually refers to people meeting via an internet service provided on mobile phones. The *deai* service provider usually supplies cute *anime* characters, illustrations and *e moji*, the cute little signs and pictures which serve as indexes of sentiment, non-verbal signifiers, acting as tools to convey identity and sentiment, and representing a new kind of semiotics. (Ill.7-14) Larissa Hjorth's study into Japanese cyber culture highlights the role of cuteness, and intersections between *kawaii* and *keitai* (mobile phone) culture, which, she argues, provide ways not only for rethinking gender, but also re-examining a wide range of relationships in contemporary Japanese society. (Hjorth 2003, 58) Cyberspace in Japan is often accessed via *keitai* devices and is being configured and familiarized through cute characters. Cuteness has become a 'ubiquitous presence within *keitai* culture'. (Hjorth 2003, 57)

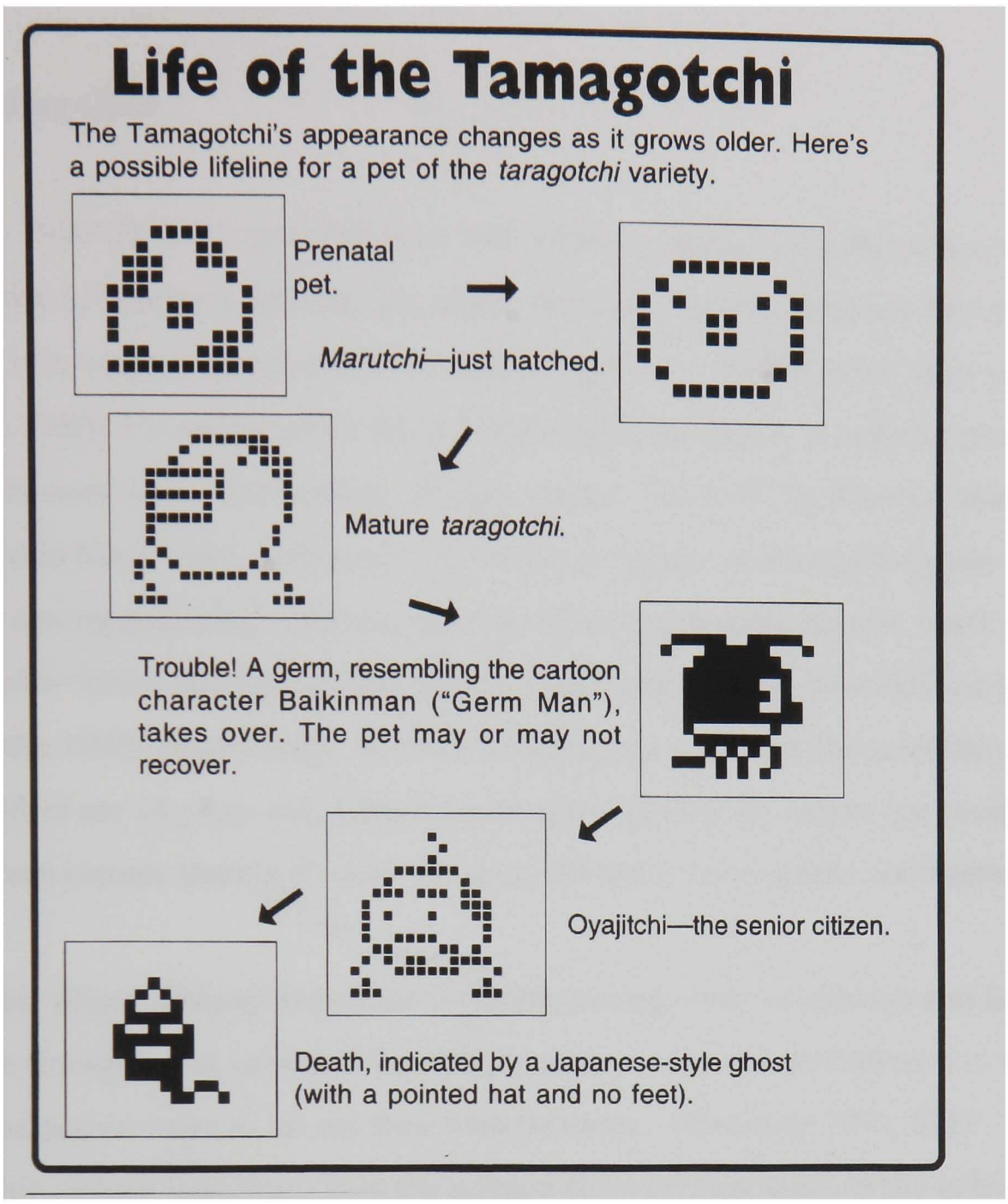
Momo, the star of Sony Communications Network's *PostPet* program, in which cyberspace pets organize and deliver email for their owner, is one of around ten virtual characters available. This very popular email software, which was first released in 1997, is an example of techno-cuteness. The pets, which include a teddy bear, bunny, kitten, tortoise, robot, hamster, penguin and puppy, have minds of their own, even independently sending email to your friends. When you receive an email the two pets do a little dance together. (Ill.7-15) When you send a reply, you get confirmation of delivery via an onscreen note from your pet telling you who he has been out playing with.

Virtual pet games first became really popular with *Tamogotchi*, the handheld toy from Bandai which created a phenomenal boom in 1997. (Ill.7-16) There were queues at stores, waiting lists, and a vibrant black market. The word '*Tamagotchi*' is a cross between '*tamago*' (egg), and '*tomodatchi*' (friend). When the egg hatches and the player must raise a chick, which beeps when it wants something – food, attention, its toilet cleaning, or just for no reason (when it should be spanked). The longevity of the chick's life depends on how well it is looked after, although popular among some boys was playing who could kill



7-14. *E-moji*, 2003
Various emoticons
Promotional post card

7-15. PetWorks and Sony Communications, 2004
Hello Kitty meets *PostPet V3*
From Mori Art Museum 2004, 48



7-16. Bandai, 1997
Tamagotchi screenshots
From *Mangajin* magazine no.65 May 1997, p14

it the fastest through maltreatment.

Beautiful Fighting Girls

Mori's Subway 1994 (Ill.7-17) and Warrior 1994 point to a history of cyborgs in anime, and the popularity of beautiful fighting girl anime and video games, in which cute young girls transform into warriors at a moment of crisis to fight evil. *Bubblegum Crisis*, for example, was a 1980s TV *anime* series set in a high-tech near future, in which a group of young women become the crime battling 'Knight Sabers'. (Ill.7-18) In *Warrior* Mariko Mori is outfitted in black vinyl, with a space commando helmet and a machine gun. She is posed to strike among glittering video arcade screens and adolescent players. Mori's work fits between *Sailor Moon* and *Evangelion*, *anime* which represent the first half and the second half of the 1990s respectively. In both, cuteness is a dominant characteristic. All the girls in *Evangelion* are 14 years old; prepubescent girls fighting the enemy are peculiar to Japan. In Western comics there's *Wonder Woman*, but she's quite mature and macho.

Donna Haraway, whose *Cyborg Manifesto* is the pioneering study in cyborgs and feminism, claims that 'the transgressive nature of the cyborg enables subject automatons (i.e. women) to retain life and active voice to invent their own (hi)story.' (Haraway 1991, 173) Haraway's ironic cyborg manifesto uses the science-fictional figuration of the cyborg as a way to account for the 'very real transformations that have occurred within the technosocial, technoscientific landscape of the late twentieth century.' (Goodeve 1998/99, 98) Livia Monnet in her analysis of the *anime Ghost in the Shell* 1995 argues that animation, as a medium, turns out to be the site of profound transformations in vision and gender. (Monnet 2002, 225-268)

Mori's cyborgs certainly raise questions around issues of gender. I questioned Mori about the fact that in many *anime* and computer games the girls while being very cute and young are also very powerful, like *Sailor Moon* for example, or *Cutey Honey*.

> I think it is reality that I portrayed in *Love Hotel*, but comics and animation, they are a portrait of people's dreams, their fantasies. So the strong women, they are probably a Japanese way of expressing feminism. Those comics were written by female artists, sometime male artists too, but I think it's probably the projection of a dream of contemporary society. (Mori interview 2004)

7-17. Mori Mariko, 1994
Subway
Fuji super gloss (duraflex) print, wood, brushed aluminium frame
686 x 102 x 5 cm
Collection Eileen and Peter Norton, Santa Monica

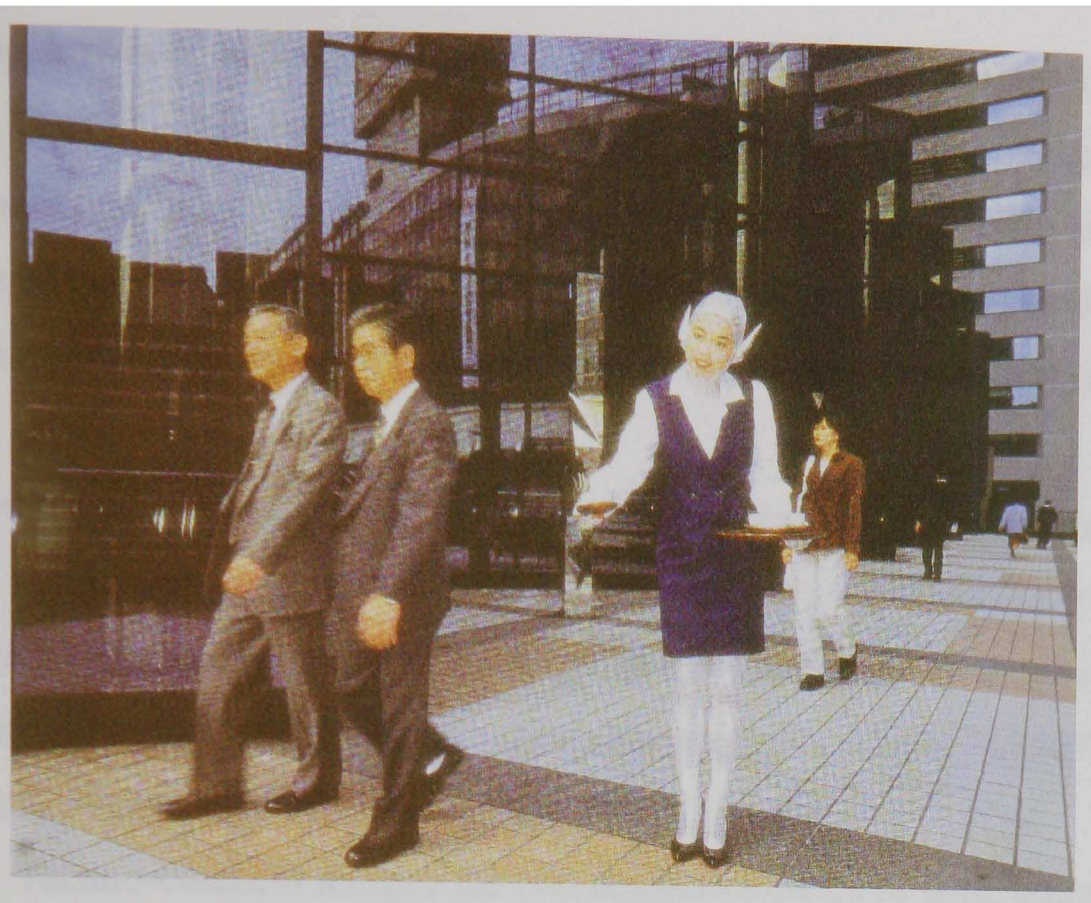
7-18. *Bubblegum Crisis 3: Blow Up*, 1987
Mega Tokyo 2032
AnimEigo

Susan Napier, in her study of *anime*, points out that in *Bubblegum Crisis*, while there are hints of female empowerment, out of their armour suits they are giggly materialist girls again. (Napier 2000, 94) *Bishôjos* do the fighting but there's no feministic 'strong woman,' the girls continue to be cute, and always wear their schoolgirl sailor uniform. (Morikawa 2003, 106)

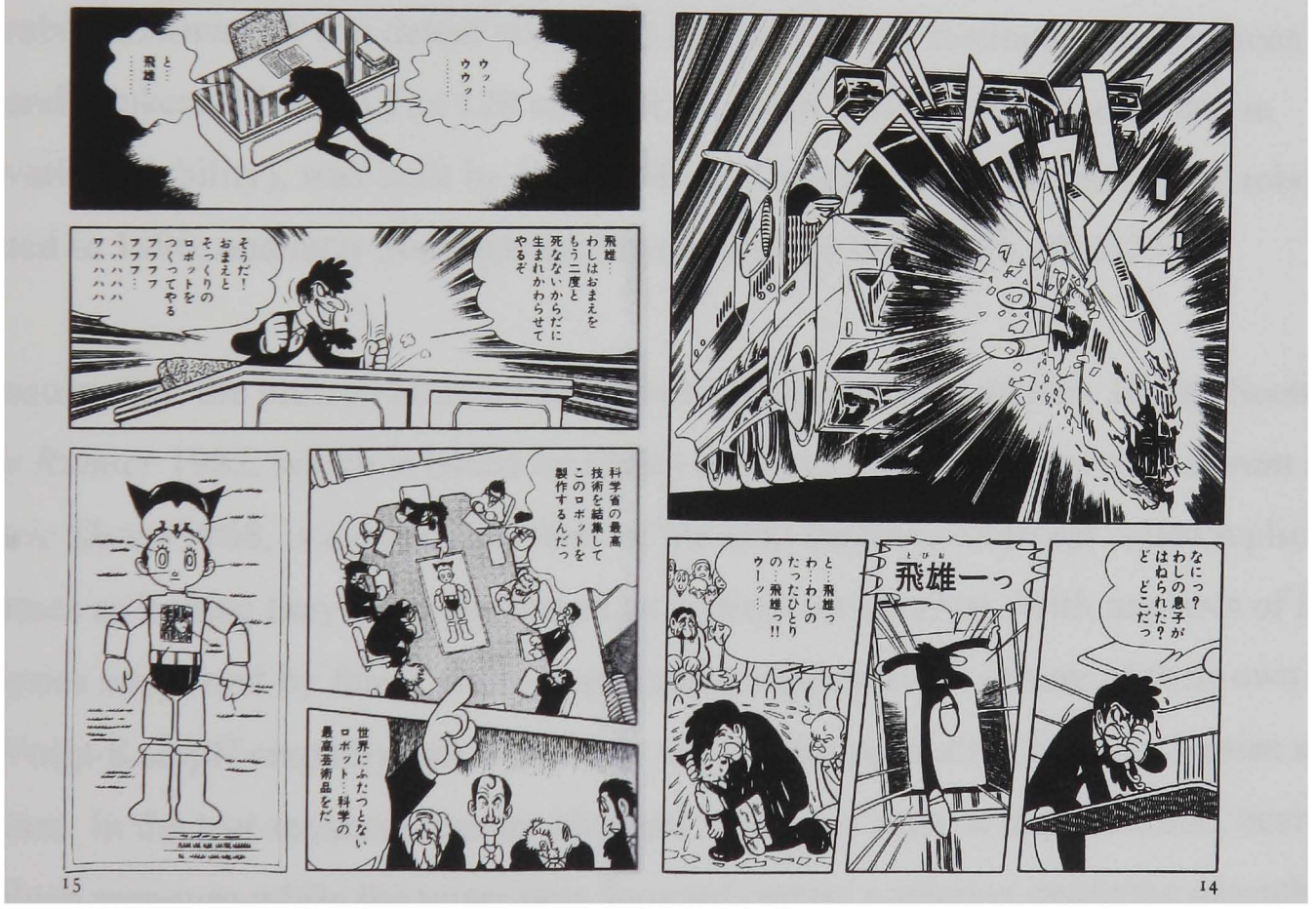
Mori states that being dressed as a robot was a metaphor for the women's situation in Japan. Women's roles such as performing the tea ceremony, or being a high school student prostitute, these roles are given to robots, and her performance is a kind of protest. (Fujimori 1995, 50-55) Shioda Junichi argues Mori's work *Tea Ceremony III* (Ill.7-19) highlights the inequality in the workplace experienced by uniformed *OL*s (Office Ladies), where women are expected to serve tea to the guests and so forth. Shioda maintains 'Mori deserves recognition for bringing a critical point of view to a cute, pop style of expression.' (Shioda 2002, 80) Shioda compares Mori to Cindy Sherman: 'In spite of outward differences, however, Mori's work is similar to that of Sherman because of its intended effect of commenting critically on women's issues.' (Shioda 2002, 79)

In *Tea Ceremony III* 1994 Mori mechanically offers her wares to the indifferent Tokyo businessmen who pass her by. 'This wide-eyed *manga* cutie conjures an image of unreal sexuality; non-organic, fluidless, bloodless – a robot.' (Cohen 1997, 94) Susan Lubowsky Talbott in her essay 'Post Human: Monsters and Cyborgs' states 'Questions about sexual identity, which dominated much art of the last decade, have been subsumed into the larger question of what it means to be human.' (Lubowsky Talbott 2001) The collapse in boundaries between humans and machines has become an important part of the postmodern.

One of the key issues in science fiction stories is the difference between human and nonhuman android, the story of the robot wanting to become human. Tezuka Osamu's *manga Tetsuwan Atomu* (Astro Boy) 1951 was first broadcast as a TV *anime* series in 1963. In the story a leading scientist Dr. Tenma, Director General of Japan's Science Ministry, lost his only son Tobio in a car accident, and decided to make a robot that looked exactly like him. (Ill.7-20) His creation was a robot called Atomu, who had the body of a young boy and sensitive, innocent eyes. When he discovered that the robot would never



7-19. Mori Mariko, 1995
Tea Ceremony III
Cibachrome print, aluminium, wood,
122 x 152 x 5 cm
Collection Eileen and Peter Norton, Santa Monica



7-20. Tezuka Osamu, 1951
Tetsuwan Atomu (*Astro Boy*)
Manga vol. 1 1995, p14-15
Kôbunsha Comic Series

grow up, however, he became increasingly disappointed and eventually sold Atomu to a circus. Thus like post-war youths in Japan, the orphaned Atomu is freed of past and of traditional familial authority. He is born of the marriage between advanced technology and dreams of the future. (Shiraishi 2000, 294) Atomu is rescued by a kind scientist Dr. Ochanomizu, and goes on to become a superhero rescuing the world from various disasters.

Mori builds on a conception of the harmony between man and technology. Rather than slaves, merely carrying out tasks that are too dangerous or too difficult for humans, robots are seen as something more like a partner. A more recent popular culture example of this is the Sony *Aibo*, the 'entertainment robot' dog originally released in 1999, and subsequently subject to increasingly cute redesigning. (Ill.7-21)

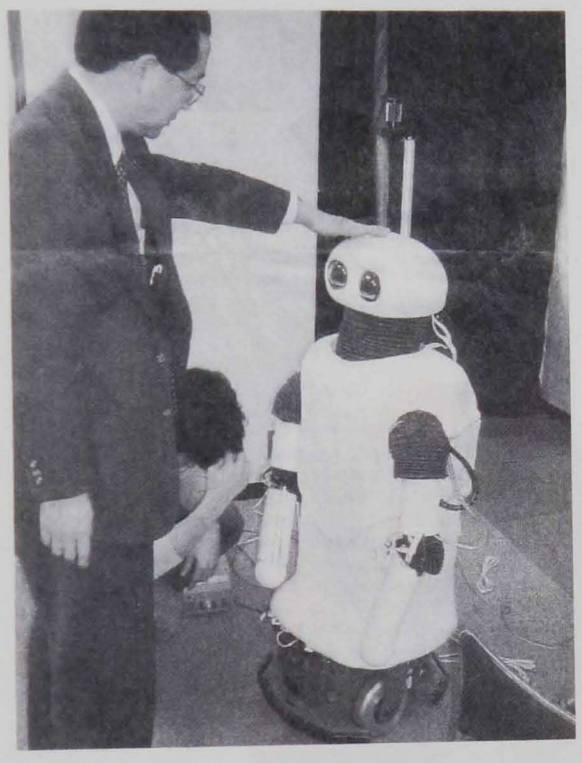
> Techno-cuteness merges the two aesthetics/ethics of cold, complicated contraptions, unfeeling objects, with warm, understandable social relations and emotional connections. Techno-cuteness, by coating complex devises with a patina of bright colours, attractive shapes, and non-threatening, even cuddly creatures firmly positions technology within the social nexus.
> (McVeigh 2003, 26)

The robot *Robovie-IIS* can detect sixty-four levels of touch, distinguishing between slaps, pats and strokes. (Ill.7-22) The 120 cm walking robot ASIMO (Advanced Step in Innovative Mobility), was built by Honda Motor Company after the initial *P@* robot which debuted in 1996, and later Sony released their robot *Qrio* in 2002. (Ill.7-23)

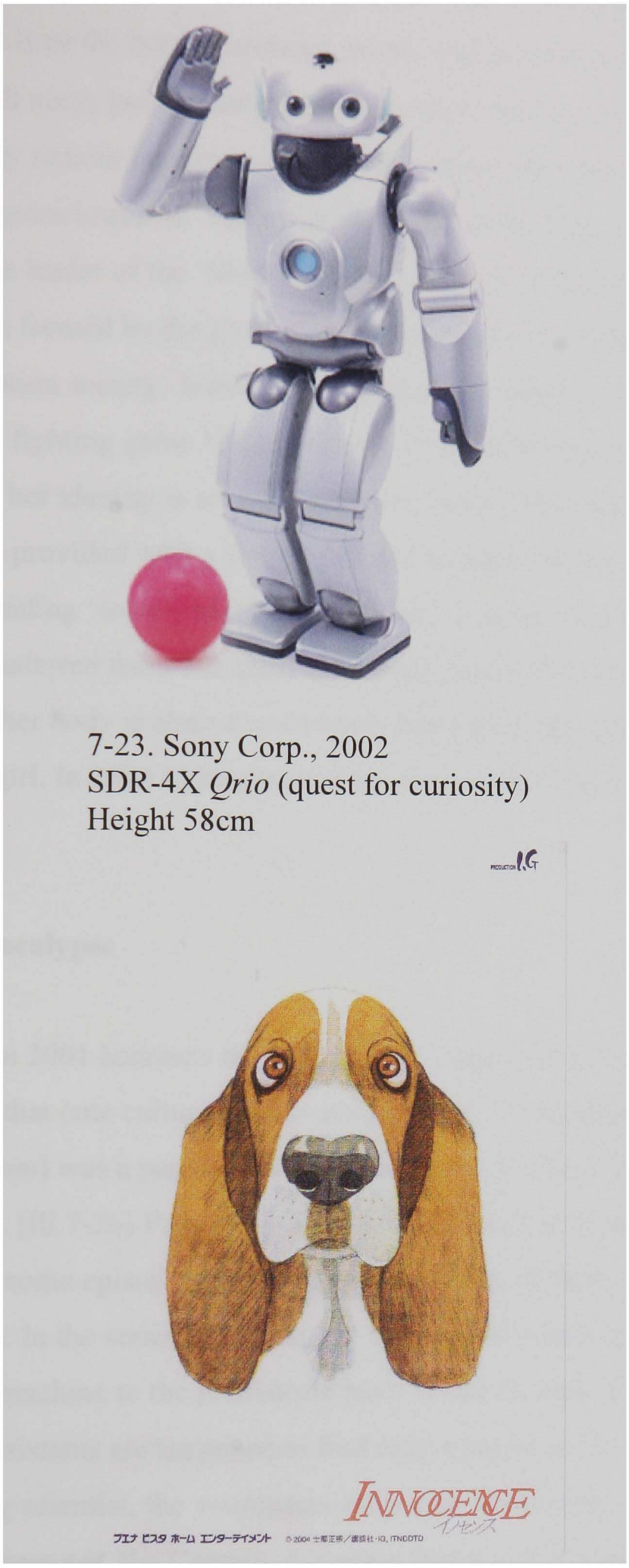
An inquiry into the blurred boundaries between humans and machines, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* 1982, which is based on Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* 1968, is a dystopian view of the next century. Androids called replicants are machines so human they have developed an instinct for survival. With implants of false memories supported by faked photographs some replicants are unsure of their own identity. The Voigt-Kampff empathy test is the only way of discriminating between human and replicant. In the test sensors measure physical responses such as pupil dilation, heartbeat, and blush response while the tester puts forward certain scenarios involving animals, such as watching a turtle turned over on its back. If empathy is the key sentiment that defines the human, cuteness becomes significant as an aesthetic that evokes empathy.

The film *Ghost in the Shell* 1995 by Oshii Mamoru, which is heavily influenced by *Blade*

7-21. Sony Communications, 2003
Aibo pet robots



7-22. *Robovie-IIS*, 2003
Photo *The Japan Times* April 3, 2003



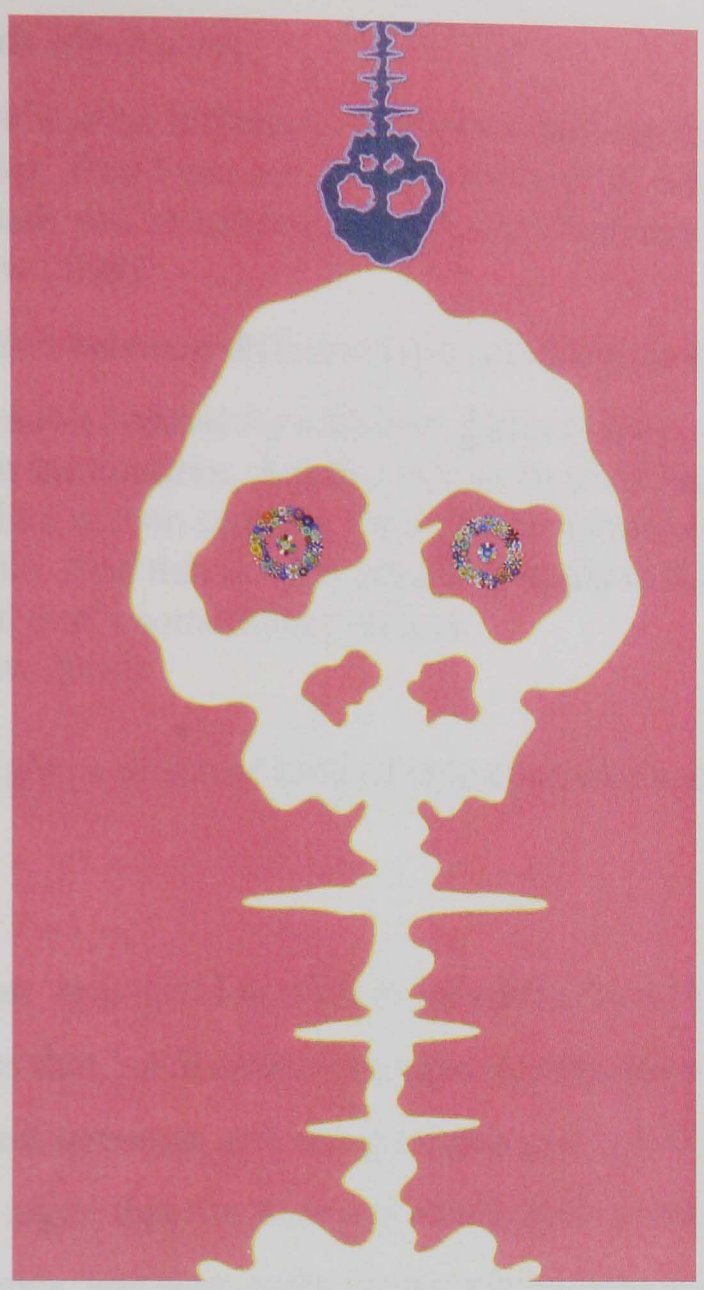
7-23. Sony Corp., 2002
SDR-4X *Qrio* (quest for curiosity)
Height 58cm

Runner, is set in the world of AD 2029, a world of cybernetics and sophisticated electronic information networks, where the border between people and machines sometimes becomes blurred or invisible, with many people having already substituted a cybernetic, prosthetic body for their own. They remain human in so far as they have their own 'ghost', meaning their own memory and consciousness. The main character of the film, a woman named Kusanagi Motoko, is the leader of the 'Shell Squad', Section 9 of the Department of the Interior, which has been formed by the government to combat cyber crimes and political terrorism in the information society. While tracking a hacker called the 'Puppet Master', a reference to the *bishôjo* fighting game *Ningyo Tsukai* (Puppet Masters), Kusanagi questions how much of her identity is actually her own, and whether she was actually made as an android and provided with a virtual self and an artificial 'ghost'. The word '*motoko*' has another reading '*soshi*', which means 'chip' as in micro chip and memory chip. Ghosts can be transferred from one shell to another, and at the end of the film, when Kusanagi is rescued as her body is almost completely destroyed, her 'ghost' is put in a new body – that of a schoolgirl. In 2004 Oshii directed the sequel which was titled *Innocence*. (Ill.7-24)

Cuteness and Post Apocalypse

Murakami's *Time Bokan* 2001 connects the post-nuclear issue with cuteness. (Ill.7-25) 'I think the exact roots of that cute culture are the atomic bomb.' (Murakami Interview 2004) *Time Bokan* (time *kaboom*) was a parody TV *anime* series by Yoshida Tatsuo 1976, produced by Tatsunoko. (Ill.7-26) Parodying other *anime* characters it occasionally even parodies itself, when in some episodes the characters make fun of themselves or other episodes of *Time Bokan*. In the series Dr. Kieta, the inventor of a time-travel machine, is lost on a test run of his machine to the prehistoric past. When the time machine returns to the present his young assistants are surprised to find only a parrot in the cockpit. In their hurry to find the missing scientist, the youngsters set out on a time-space hunt without any clear destination. One character, the Captain, is a sexy, blond girl destined by several events to remain half-naked in all episodes. The end of the series is a fantastic stage-trick that turns each episode to a non-sense story.

For Mori the connection of cuteness with World War II is not so straightforward and



7-25.Murakami, 2001
Time Bokan – pink
Acrylic on canvas, mounted on wood
180 x 180 cm

7-26. Yoshida Tatsuo, 1976
Time Bokan (Time kaboom) series
Yatta Man screen shot
Tatsunoko Productions
Photo the author

suggests different kinds of cuteness.

> Of course there's some influence. There is a darkness in 70s comics, in 60s comics, post-war comics. That I can see. It is probably post-war syndrome, but the cute characters, which you're talking about, I don't feel any darkness.
> (Mori interview 2004)

Mori makes a distinction between different types of characters explaining that,

> Disney is like adult created for children, *Hello Kitty* is more childish, a childlike mind created it for children. Another one is an adult businessman creating for a child. A childlike person creating for a child is totally different. It's more honest, more vulnerable. And that is what attracted adults in the end. Because it's the innocence, and that's something you lost.
> (Mori interview 2004)

Mori then, also highlights a different kind of cute character used to evoke a child-like innocence.

Morikawa speaks of an 'armageddon wish as salvation from this faded reality' and referring to *Aum* states that 'such *anime*-coloured Armageddon fantasies did in fact incite a religious cult to commit terrorists acts using poison gas in 1995.' (Morikawa 2004, 28) Morikawa goes on to argue that the *Aum* gas attack dealt a swift blow to infatuations with post-armageddon heroics, and sent *otaku* 'scurrying back to the school-days nostalgia of depicting the imaginary daily life of adorable young girls.' This trend toward love-fixation upon *bishôjo* 'nymphs' came to be called *moe*, soon supplanting *otaku* visions of a cataclysmic *kin mirai* 'near future'. (Morikawa 2004, 28) I asked Mori if cuteness then represented a covering up, or whether it was a kind of rebirth.

> I feel it's more like wish fulfilment. I think those *otaku* things, which obviously had started much earlier, but in fact after the economic bubble the phenomenon of cuteness was even more exaggerated, I think, so optimism.
> (Mori interview 2004)

While Mori emphasizes the role of cuteness in creating a new beginning, there is also the suggestion that cuteness might also be involved in a covering up.

The post apocalypse nature of much science fiction *anime* has often been commented on. Susan Napier notes that 'Indeed, perhaps one of the most striking features of *anime* is its fascination with the theme of apocalypse' (Napier 2000, 193), while Freida Freiberg argues that Japan has been gripped by a notion of what she calls the 'post nuclear sublime'. (Freiberg 1996, 91-101) This is linked, Napier argues, to the bombings of World War II: 'Of course, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are the most obvious

catalysts to apocalyptic thought.' (Napier 2000, 197) Susan Sontag also asserts that science fiction films are often about exorcising the mass trauma associated with the use of nuclear weapons and their possible use in future conflicts. (Sontag 1996, 41) Catherine Russell argues that 'the continuing presence of monstrous fantasy figures in urban *anime* suggests that the combustible city is haunted by an irrepressible memory.' (Russell 2002, 221) Freiberg argues 'being made in Japan, it is a post-nuclear version of the apocalypse rather than a prefigurement of the End of the World.' (Freiberg 1996, 95) For Japan, then, unlike for the West, postmodern means not nuclear sublime but post nuclear.

The story of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* revolves around 'The Second Impact' (the First Impact being a cosmic impact over 4 billion years ago), a mysterious event that took place at the Antarctic on 13 September 2000, which instantly melted the polar cap and sent a devastating deluge across the globe, permanently shifting the Earth's axis. A series of wars and nuclear strikes follow, in which half of the planet's population perish. It was triggered somehow by human contact with the 'First Angel', named Adam. At the time of the millennium's Second Impact a number of special children were born, and the series depicts five of these children selected to pilot a test range of giant cyborgs, the Evangelions (or EVA units). The purpose of the offensive and the true identity of the 'angels,' actually in the Japanese *shito* meaning 'apostle' (Napier 2000), are totally unknown. Fifteen years after the Second Impact, Tokyo 3 has been built at the foot of Mt. Fuji, under a decoy city, Tokyo 2, for protection against the angels. Throughout the series, angel after angel appear in astonishingly complex and incomprehensible forms, from giant humanoids, insects and sea monsters, to geometrically perfect monoliths, to manifestations of pure light and energy.

Akira is set in Neo-Tokyo in 2019, thirty-one years after World War III. The *manga*, which first appeared in 1983, was followed by the *anime* version in 1988. The *anime* starts with images of the atomic explosions of World War III. Thomas Looser argues 'the trope of the apocalyptic city at the outset of an *anime* film in effect insists on the destruction of the classically modern fixed origin, or anchor, of identity.' (Looser 2002, 310) *Akira* is in many ways 'a postmodern celebration of apocalypse.' (Napier 2000, 204) In the *anime* there are parallels with actual post World War II Japan. The Olympic site under construction represents a 'failed' version of the Tokyo Olympics in 1964, for which Japan made great efforts to show its full recovery from the defeat in World War II and restore its

national pride. The Neo-Tokyo of *Akira* would thus seem to fit Jameson's view of science fiction's function. Rather than offering us images of the future, he argues that SF representations 'defamilarize and restructure our experience of our own present'. (Jameson 1982, 151)

The absence of narrative coherence is a crucial postmodern characteristic. Freiberg's study of *Akira* highlights its confusing narrative and connects this to the schizophrenic nature of the postmodern text, whose narratives are either disjointed or fragmented and incoherent. In particular the bright white frames, at the beginning and the end of the film, which represent the sublimity of nuclear destruction. In place of an experience of history passing before our eyes, we get a sensory battering of high intensity. (Freiberg 1996, 95) Time is not experienced as a continuum, a linear progression from past to present to future, from childhood to maturity to old age, but as a series of continual presents. In *Evangelion* between the 16th episode and the last half of the series the world constructed in the animation begins to implode. It is impossible to summarize the plot of the last half. In the last two episodes after the destruction of the Last Angel, Shinji begins to lose his human form, becoming an abstract image and a disembodied voice, regressing back into his childhood. The sudden abandonment of the narrative conclusion brought about an intense shock in animation fans. (Azuma 1997, 1-7) *Neon Genesis Evangelion*'s narrative strategies deliberately disrupt conventional discourse, so much so that the final two episodes deconstruct the entire series.

A fourteen-year-old boy who shrinks from human contact, and tries to live in a closed world, Shinji is very *otaku*-like. Napier explores the Oedipal relationship between Shinji and his father. His social and psychological withdrawal from the world, fuelled by Oedipal wrath against his father for abandoning him, 'Shinji's story is in a sense a coming-of-age drama.' (Napier 2000, 102) Broderick argues Anno's articulation is of apocalypse as a 'rite of passage', not only for the hero, but for humankind as well, referring to Michael Oritz Hill's 1994 study of the linear historical movement of the apocalypse. (Broderick 1998, n.p.)

In *Akira* the two heroes of the film, Kaneda and Tetsuo are both orphans, while *Space Battleship Yamato* is also a futuristic projection of an earth of innocent, untainted children left behind in the wake of a nuclear holocaust. (Broderick 1996) Science and technology

are intimately associated with children in *Tetsuwan Atomu*, and a cuteness that suggests innocence and new life. Essentially about the relationship between humans and technology, Atomu being nuclear powered, is a symbol of the confidence and hope people place in technology as the trustee of the future of their children. The Japanese nuclear industry turned to animation to create the TV advertising character *Plutonium Boy* to peddle their fast-breeder nuclear programme to the local population. (Broderick 1996, 8) Technology which once caused total devastation, is purified by its association with and use by an innocent child, and children are consequently empowered as those who are responsible for befriending and advancing science and technology.' (Shiraishi 2000, 296) It is significant that Atomu is a child, rescuing the world because of adults' mistakes. Philip Brophy's essay on animation also refers to

> the childlike innocence revelling in cartoonish explosions, and the ominous yet captivating aftermath of nuclear devastation, which signposts the post-war sensibilities that have governed the modern and postmodern strands of the medium. (Brophy 1994, 9)

An image of a cute *shôjo* character with a background of a post nuclear urban wasteland from the *anime Time Bokan* provides a good example. (Ill.7-27)

In *Akira*, a group of mutants who look like children, but have the face of old age, are held by the government to exploit their special powers. Frozen in childhood, the image of a child with an old face, the mixture of cuteness and the grotesque, is very disturbing. (Napier 1996, 235-262) Another transformation of cuteness occurs in a scene where Tetsuo is in hospital surrounded by cute teddy bears and children's toys, which attack him. The ultimate nightmare is embodied in this imagery of the nursery: teddy bears and rabbits, those cute, comforting and cuddly children's toys, grow into giants that loom over him aggressively, like menacing monsters; Lego blocks encircle him like military weapons; and milk (the quintessential mother product) gushes forth from all of them, threatening to drown him. (Freiberg 1996, 98) It is 'an eerie vision in which the grotesque toys undermine such established Japanese conventions as the sweetness of children and the culture of cuteness (*kawaii*) in general.' (Napier 2000, 205) The attack of the cute toys suggests a potential arrogation of power by 'children', by a generation very different from

7-27. Yoshida Tatsuo 1976
Time Bokan (Time kaboom) screen shot
Tatsunoko Productions

the one in control. (Napier 1996, 252)

By contrast, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* 1995 includes references to the Dead Sea Scrolls; Anno embraces the intrinsically dualistic nature of apocalyptic teleology – from destruction and chaos comes rebirth and renewal. The *anime* tells of three scientists, who in the late 1990s had commenced work on the mystical prophecies of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the predictions of the apocalyptic battles to come. Anno's project is a postmodernist retelling of the Genesis myth. It is a new myth of origin, a futuristic projection of an earth of innocent, untainted children left behind in the wake of a nuclear holocaust.

The background for Mori's *Pure Land* 1996-98 is the Dead Sea, with the image of a Bodhisattva attended to by the cartoon-like 'toons' playing traditional Japanese instruments. (Ill.7-28) This image 'references the Buddhist doctrine of *mappô*, which revolves around the notion of a fallen world saved by a the Maitreya Buddha.' (Fouser 1998, 35-36)

> When I saw the Bodhisattvas, and the Buddhist statues, the peacefulness and the fulfilment, those kinds of emotions, or rather those kinds of feelings, are substituted on to the cartoon characters. In other words when you look at a Buddhist sculpture people expect to feel peaceful, people expect to feel fulfilled. It seems to me in contemporary culture that the cute icons are a substitute for the Buddhist sculpture in our culture, to make you feel calm, relaxed, to feel good. (Mori interview 2004)

Pure Land is reminiscent of late Heian period art, the *Amida Raigo* triptych for example with its central Buddhist figure, surrounded by smaller figures on clouds, playing instruments (Ill.7-29)

Pure Land 'undoubtedly refers to the Pure Land School of Buddhist thought prevalent in Japan.' (Molon 1998, 15) In early Heian period in Japan 'the emergent sect of Jodo (Pure Land) Buddhism' was primarily devoted to Amida, Buddha of the Pure Land, also called the Western Paradise. 'The Western Paradise was painted as a bounteous land of celestial sights and sounds, where jewels and flowers bloomed on every tree', and 'represents one of the most lyrical visions of deity achieved by any faith,' (Lee 1994, 326) While Carol Eliel says 'Pure land is the paradise achieved by the worship of the *Amitabha* (or Amida) Buddha, a paradise marked by its sensuous, pleasure loving aspects.' (Eliel 1998, 30)

Pure Land Buddhism also marked a move away from Buddhism for the aristocracy and the

7-28. Mori Mariko, 1996-98
Pure Land
Colour photograph on glass
305 x 610 x 2.1 cm (five panels each 122cm wide)
Deitch Projects, New York

7-29. *Amida raigo* triptych, late 11th century
Colour on silk
Height 210 cm
Kôyasan Museum, Wakayama

intelligentsia.

> To reach unsophisticated viewers, Amidist art had to be intellectually unassuming and emotionally compelling. The unique icon of Amidism is the *raigo*, Amida's 'welcoming approach' to escort the soul of the dying to the Pure Land. (Lee 1994, 407)

Amidism had first emerged in the 10th century and was popular with laymen who could follow the simple doctrine of worship Amida and go to paradise. Mori's fusion of futuristic utopia and everyday reality is optimistic for the future. 'Like the Buddhist themes in Tezuka's cartoons, this merging of the spiritual with the popular is light-heartedly evoked.' (Eliel 1998, 38)

> Mori's paradisiac worlds of pleasure are far removed from the lurid and dystopic tomorrow lands regularly depicted in the science-fiction movies and paperbacks to which they often are compared. She appears in computerized dreamscapes full of the harmony and bliss of Mandala Buddhist tradition. (Molon 1998, 8)

Mori's view of the future is 'refreshingly upbeat.' (Weaver 1997)

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the works of Japanese contemporary artists, particularly Murakami Takashi and Mori Mariko, and their relation to the cuteness present in the virtual reality of computer games, science-fiction *manga* and *anime* and cyber culture. Connections were made to the issue of the human, where cuteness has been used to induce empathy, and issues of gender, and also where cuteness has been used to evoke an innocence and a suggestion of the birth of a new life, and the separation from an evil or traumatic past. Particularly important was the post apocalyptic nature of this area of Japanese popular culture.

In his essay on the end of the millennium, Baudrillard quotes Elias Canetti, and his claim that 'as of a certain point, history was no longer real. Without noticing it, all mankind suddenly left reality'. (Baudrillard 1994, 1) Canetti wrote this in 1945, when the atomic bomb had destroyed the 'last myth': the sun. With Hiroshima and Nagasaki, he argued 'light is dethroned, the atomic bomb has become the measure of all things. The tiniest thing has won: a paradox of power'. (Canetti 1985, 67) With relation to this post atomic bomb, postmodern condition, this chapter has shown cuteness to be a key aesthetic in Japan.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

This thesis set out to investigate contemporary Japanese artists and their relation to the cuteness seen in Japanese popular culture. An analysis of cuteness, an aesthetic that has previously been dismissed as trivial and outside the traditional realm of art history, provided a new context for reading cuteness, while interviews with Aida Makoto, Murakami Takashi and Mori Mariko provided new research material. These three artists along with Nara Yoshitomo are the main focus of research.

These artists were carefully selected to cover all the issues. While they often overlapped, Murakami was particularly important regarding commodification, art and kitsch, Nara includes nostalgia, Aida the grotesque and erotic, and Mori the relation of cuteness to the high tech world of virtual reality and science fiction. Mori featured less, and in particular it was her earlier works. To some extent Mori is outside Japan. The position of these artists in Japan was also a consideration. Murakami is the most important artist in Japan, Nara is extremely well known. Aida offers the balance of a less commercial artist. Other lesser known artists were included, particularly ones who participated in the group shoes, but a number who went over the same ground, and attracted less coverage, were not.

The question of what contribution Japanese contemporary art makes has to be considered in the light of how cuteness is interpreted. This thesis explored the instrumentality of the context of cuteness, in *shôjo manga*, in commodity design and marketing, the commodification of objects, in the gallery, in *otaku* subculture and new technology. The four artists represent a generation born in the 1960s, and for whom the 1980s was shown to be a key period, but as a younger generation of artists emerges their attitudes to cuteness will become important. This thesis has dealt with a particular generation, and cuteness is an essential component for looking at this group.

Chapter 2 questioned the relationship of cuteness to the process of commodification, and the proliferation of cuteness in contemporary Japanese popular culture. Murakami's character *Mr. DOB*, a key motif in his work, represents a disengaged signifier, and a symbol of all the other artificially constructed characters that sell merchandise. With his direct references to the cuteness of characters such as *Miffy*, and *Hello Kitty*, while also referencing Japanese *manga* which had played a key role in the rise of cuteness in Japanese

popular culture. Murakami questions what happened in the cultural scene in Japan after World War II, and what was born especially as a result of the influence of imported pop culture. The contemporary artists, examined in this thesis, have engaged with Japanese popular culture, and through it have attempted to locate a contemporary Japanese identity that is expressed through commodity culture. Cuteness was shown to be not merely something trivial, but something which involves power play and gender role issues.

In the examination of *shôjo* culture issues of gender and a feminist critique, played out in the writings of Brian McVeigh and Sharon Kinsella, have been replaced with Baudrillard's concept of seduction, and the creation of a whole metaphysics of appearance, which represent an alternative to modernist depth models. A process of 'infantilization' has meant the term *shôjo* is now applicable to postmodern identity as a whole, and not restricted to young girls, according to a number of Japanese cultural theorists.

In this investigation of the dissemination of cuteness, the impact of American cultural expression, which came to Japan through occupation after World War II, is a key finding of this research. In the interview with Murakami Takashi, he referred to the impotence of *anime* culture, and traced the roots of cuteness in Japanese popular culture to the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Aida Makoto, in my interview with him, related the use of cuteness to a loss of dignity, the problematisation of a father's authority, and the abandonment of a macho façade in Japan after the defeat of World War II. Mori Mariko also referred to ideas of cuteness and the post-war post-apocalyptic in my interview with her.

How Japanese contemporary artists have used cuteness to deconstruct traditional artistic values was examined in chapter 3. 'Super Flat', the exhibition curated by Murakami that began in Parco Gallery Tokyo in 2000 and by inclusion of non fine artists, sought to break down notions of the high and low in art, and to deconstruct artistic values based on the dialectic between the avant-garde and kitsch, which has been an issue 'ever since the exchange society caught hold of artistic production and made it too a commodity.' (Adorno 2004, 397) For Adorno, while kitsch is produced by the culture industry, it is not the 'mere refuse of art', rather 'a poison admixed to all art.' (Adorno 2004, 312) In this way, cuteness, which has been shown to be inextricably linked to kitsch, resembles Derrida's notion of the

pharmakon, both poison and cure at once, a force which Maharaj takes as a metaphor for Pop Art's undecidable element, and its shuttling between opposites. (Maharaj 1991, 20)

Sampling and mimicking to blur the boundaries between old and new, the citing of pre-modern artistic practice and Murakami's alignment with Tsuji Nobuo, suggested a way of bypassing the Western influence, and a way for Japanese artists to reclaim Japanese popular culture, and included an element of nationalism. Aida's mocking of *Nihonga*, a word used to distinguish that genre from Western-style painting, represented a politicising of *Nihonga*, and its deconstruction, less as an historic style, and more as an embodiment of Japanese social problems, and a consideration of the future landscape of Japanese art.

A central issue to this enquiry was whether contemporary art can maintain an element of critique given that culture is locked into the structure of commodity production. Although art is allowed to speak against this, it is complicit with it. For Adorno, art can only hope to be valid if it provides an implicit critique of the conditions which produce it, but must also acknowledge how deeply it is compromised by what it opposes. Murakami's 'Super Flat Monogram' series of luxury handbags asked serious questions as to the role of art in the face of commercialization and its threat to objectify art. In his blatant merchandising Murakami has taken the media modes and commodity forms of late capitalism to new extremes, representing an alignment with Baudrillard's notion that the only way for art to maintain a critique is to become more mercantile than merchandise itself, 'art should rid itself of its traditional aura and authority and bask in the pure obscenity of being merchandise.' (Baudrillard 1995, 18-21) Terry Eagleton also states that the solution to this dilemma of culture in late capitalism is to press it to a calculated extreme,

> so that in a defiant reversal it is the very impotence of an autonomous art which will be wrenched into its finest aspect, victory snatched from the jaws of defeat as art's shaming privilege and futility is carried to a Beckettian limit and at that point begins to veer on its axis to become (negative) critique. (Eagleton 1990, 349)

It represents a process which is symptomatic of the late 20th century fascination and pleasure in the surface.

An illustration in chapter 3 of Dick Bruna's *Miffy* at the gallery, looking puzzled in front of a Van Doesburg, alluded to this pleasure in the surface, and the convergence of fine art and character design. *Miffy*'s puzzlement might also stem from the use of colour, the blue,

yellow and red of the Van Doesburg. Bruna attaches a lot of importance to colours, carefully choosing the introduction of the brown for *Boris Bear*, for example. Colour is an important aspect of cuteness. Peach, orange and yellow, the colours of fruit, cuteness often makes use of the edible. The 'bright bonbon colours' of Nara, 'mint green, cherry red, plum blue', (Trescher 2001, 17) reflect this. Pastel colours are also common. Baby-blue conjures up images of childhood, and a nostalgic process, which *Miffy*'s 50th anniversary in 2005 shows, has become increasingly important. Although Bruna doesn't use pink, the colour pink seems ubiquitous with the cute aesthetic. *Hello Kitty*'s bubblegum pink, also suggests the edible, confection and food colouring, the artificial. Pink is also a skin colour, of babies, but also a more sexual adult pink, the 'pink' industry in Japan.

The relationship of cuteness to the erotic was examined in chapter 4. Through an exploration into the subculture world of *otaku*, the obsessive *manga* and *anime* fans in Japan, this chapter investigated the 1998 exhibition 'Ero Pop Christmas', and Murakami's figure projects such as *Miss Ko*^{2} 1996, *Hiropon* 1997 and *My Lonesome Cowboy* 1998. Questioning how the cuteness in Japanese *ero manga* (adult comics) and *anime*, particularly *rorikon* (Lolita complex) *manga*, conflicted with the often violent and pornographic content, and represented a displacement of cuteness, this chapter formulated a reading of *otaku* subculture as a subversive resistance to the hegemony of consumption, where cuteness was used in what Dick Hebdige terms a deviant pattern of consumption. (Hebdige 1979) The importance of parody in particular, was found to be crucial in this research into *otaku*.

The aesthetic of cuteness, while representing innocence, is in fact a 'heavily mannered aesthetic', (Harris 2000, 2) a 'seductive and manipulative aesthetic that arouses our sympathies.' (Harris 2000, 4) With rounded bodies and faces, arms cut off below the elbow, cuteness is closely linked to the grotesque, the malformed. The issue of cuteness and the grotesque is explored in chapter 4, particularly with reference to the works of Aida Makoto. Because it aestheticises unhappiness, helplessness, and deformity, it almost always involves an act of sadism on the part of its creator. The element of the grotesque in cuteness is deliberate, an explicit intention to elicit emotions. In 'anatomical pariahs, like the Cabbage Patch Dolls, or even E.T.', (Harris 2000, 4) the grotesque is pitiable.

Chapter 5 explored the reasons underlying Sawaragi Noi's claim that 'monster', was one of the key words that captured the meaning of 'Tokyo Pop'. (Sawaragi 1999a, 70-78) In the *Melting DOB* series 1999, Murakami's character *Mr. DOB* mutates into a jagged-toothed monster, a transformation from the childish, innocence of *Mr. DOB* to a demon-like *Mr. DOB*, representing a switching between selves, and evoking what has been termed a postmodern schizophrenia, characterised by Baudrillard not as a loss of touch with reality but 'by the absolute proximity to and total instantaneousness with the world.' (Baudrillard 1983b, 133) In my interview with Murakami he referred to the drug-like effect of cuteness, and thereby added weight to the connection with certain postmodern theorists, such as Frederic Jameson, who have highlighted a symptomatic changeover from anxiety, the dominant feeling of intensity in modernism, to a different system of which schizophrenic or drug language gives us the key notion. (Jameson in Stephanson 1986/87, 69) Research into the issues of *otaku* and their alignment with the non-oedipal, with relation to Deleuze and Guatarri's concepts of schizophrenia, is another complex area which falls outside the limits this research, but could be a focus for further research.

Chapter 6 sought to investigate the relation of cuteness to nostalgia, and question how this has informed the work of a generation of contemporary Japanese artists, and established connections with psychoanalysis, and childhood trauma. The key importance of the nostalgia evoked by cuteness, was highlighted particularly in the works of Nara Yoshitomo, who often includes a horror element in his typically cute figures. Nara's work represents an uncovering, quite like a psychoanalytical process, by confronting the elements we choose to forget, but rather than an application of psychoanalytic theory, Nara's work suggested a rethinking of certain psychoanalytic concepts.

Through Mori Mariko's early works, such as *Play with Me* 1994 which was set in the electric appliance and computer equipment stores of Akihabara, an area of Tokyo famous for cheap electrical goods, as it was beginning to realign its focus towards computer software, games and science-fiction *manga* and *anime* DVDs, chapter 7 investigated how contemporary art has questioned the cuteness represented in this new space of virtual reality. The issue of how *bishôjo* fighting girls go beyond the human was also highlighted as an important topic, particularly in science-fiction *manga* and *anime*. While the question of gender was again an important issue in this chapter, as it was in chapter 4, there is still a need for more research focussed solely on this area.

Murakami, in his Super Flat manifesto, likens the Super Flat experience to the merging of flat layers in the creation of a desktop graphic on a personal computer. (Murakami 2000a, 5) This resonates with certain notions of the postmodern, in particular Baudrillard's concept of the screen. (Baudrillard 1983b, 126-134) Cuteness lends itself to the design of desktop icons, adding emotional power to simple two-dimensional graphics, as representation moves away from the reflection of reality towards becoming pure simulation, along a 'complex semiotic continuum' whose major trait, Brophy identified as cute. (Brophy 1997, 28)

I set out to conduct research focusing on the aesthetic of cuteness. If the boundaries are widened, further research into complex areas which fall outside the limits of this research. There are certain issues and areas of research, which are important, but that have intentionally not been pursued in this thesis. The *angora* movement, for example offers an area of research to be further developed. The relative importance of George Bataille in Japan, could reveal new insights into Japanese culture. Bataille raises other issues, which could be developed as areas of further exploration, such as young girl sexuality, and the figuring of eros and the body in relationship to the virtual.

Japan's high-tech cultural industries have touched the imaginations and lives of millennial children in this era of cyber technology and post-industrial socialisation. Given the predilection for Japanese-made *anime* and games, it is often assumed that *otaku* are a uniquely Japanese phenomenon, yet *otaku*-like persons are known to exist the world over. They are arising on their own regardless of national boundaries, and hence must be regarded as something of a new order within the culture sphere. As technology continues its rapid progress, virtual reality becomes more and more important. The question of a renewed Japonisme or cynical nationalism seems to miss the collapse of cultural hierarchies that postmodernism promises.

Murakami also stated in his Super Flat Manifesto, that 'The future of the world might be like Japan is today – super flat.' (Murakami 2000a, 5) *Anime*, computer games, cyber technology and robots, while often associated with particularly Japanese popular culture, are also intrinsically linked to the postmodern and have implications outside of Japan. In the new situation of globalism Japanese culture takes on a new significance. The end of

history that the Hiroshima explosion, or the Holocaust brought about does not only affect Japan. 'Japan is already a satellite of the planet Earth. But America was already in its day a satellite of the planet Europe. Whether we like it or not, the future has shifted towards artificial satellites.' (Baudrillard 1989, 76) Baudrillard goes on to state, America, like everyone else, 'now has to face up to a soft world order, a soft situation. Power has become impotent.' (Baudrillard 1989, 107) The methodology of this thesis represents a new model of looking at contemporary art that could be continued in this global context. My research has been largely limited to Japan, and a more global perspective would be a way to develop this thesis. Japanese culture in the US for example, is an important area for further research. Japan then becomes the starting point for a methodology that can be applied to other countries.

That cuteness is often dismissed as trivial and superficial lead to a lack of serious analysis. The significant gap between the high visibility of cuteness in Japanese popular culture, and serious critical writing on it, while contemporary artists were including cuteness in their works in a number of ways presented the new ground for this research. This thesis has analysed cuteness within the various themes of commodification, the deconstruction of the high and low in contemporary art, the transformation of cuteness into the grotesque, nostalgia, advanced technology and virtual reality. The implications of cute sexuality, how it relates to censorship, hierarchy, relationships, and the 'impotence culture' of Japan, were also examined. The proliferation of cuteness in Japan cannot be explained by one single cause, rather it is due to a combination of factors, as cuteness is made use of by numerous agencies for multiple reasons. In this study I found the key origins cuteness to be related to *shôjo* culture, Japan-US relations and ultimately World War II.

In my interviews with the artists the significance of World War II became increasingly apparent with respect to the spread of cuteness in contemporary Japanese culture. Murakami referred to the atomic explosions of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Aida referred to Japan's defeat, and Mori also referred to a Japanese post-war syndrome. Many of the key figures in this research, such as Dick Bruna, Tsuji Shintarô of Sanrio and Mizuki Shigeru, were also found to have had traumatic experiences linked to World War II. Where in Europe the Holocaust caused a crisis in modernism and raised the issue of 'Art after Auschwitz', in Japan the atomic explosions have had a similarly profound effect, and cuteness can be seen in part as a post traumatic expression of this. Murakami also referred

to post-war Japan and what he described as being organised according to America's convenience, where cuteness, as a way of expressing powerlessness, fits well with the no war constitution and the relationship with America after the war.

In every chapter a link was also found with the key characteristics of the postmodern, as described by Frederic Jameson for example, including the integration of aesthetic production into commodity production generally, a new depthlessness and superficiality of contemporary culture, a schizophrenic aspect, the importance of nostalgia and parody, and the deep constitutive relationship of all this to a new technology. (Jameson in Stephanson 1986/87) Postmodernism though is an ambiguous term, and if on the one hand it can represent, 'the latest iconoclastic upsurge of the avant garde, with its demotic confounding of hierarchies', and a 'self-reflexive subversion of ideological closure', it can also be accused of 'consumerist hedonism and philistine anti-historicism', and a 'wholesale abandonment of critique'. (Eagleton 1990, 373) The fact that both descriptions apply simultaneously, postmodernist culture can be seen as 'both radical and conservative, iconoclastic and incorporated, in the same breath.' (Eagleton 1990, 373)

Theodor Adorno in *Aesthetic Theory* 1970 stated that kitsch might be the 'true progress' of art. (Adorno 2004, 398) This thesis puts forward the argument that cuteness, even as this perverse destination of modernism, is one of the key aesthetics of Japanese contemporary art, where the artists Murakami Takashi, Aida Makoto, Mori Mariko and Nara Yoshitomo have all made cuteness a central part of their work. A major aesthetic development, along Baudrillard's precession of simulacra, ends in the cute images which are such a significant part of contemporary Japanese culture. The analysis of these popular culture images and artists' works reveals cuteness to be a definitive aesthetic of the 20th century.

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Appendices

I. Makoto Aida Interview

April 2nd 2004

Sawaragi Noi said you are not 'Super Flat' like Murakami, because it seems like there is still irony in your works. What do you think about this?

> …my own works have sold well. Is that a good thing, I'm not sure.
> Mr. Murakami represents Japanese art. In Mr. Murakami's works, it looks like the motivation is for the good of society. Actually I don't care what becomes of Japan. I am irresponsible. I only think about myself. Murakami is a graduate of the Department of *Nihonga*. Although I have also painted *Nihonga*-like works, I am a graduate of the Department of Oil Painting. However, recently Murakami and I have both been using acrylics. We use neither traditional oils, nor *Nihonga* mineral pigments. Maybe, since the Meiji era, I think *Nihonga* and oil painting have been fundamentally different. In *Nihonga*, from the Meiji era, looking at what it tries to express, artists have been on a mission to express the Japanese spirit, the soul of Japan, Japanese beauty. However, in the so called oil painting department, or Western-style painting department, the artist wants to be richly sensitive, to be popular with women, to paint individualistic paintings, to enjoy life, then to die, just like Umehara Ryûzaburô. There still remains something of such a tradition. Hirayama Ikuo's activities also, are for society and look bureaucratic. Mr. Murakami's works are also a bit bureaucratic, by that I mean working for society. As for me, I'm not in the least like that.

Hello Kitty and other Sanrio characters appear in the *Gunjyo-zu* series, 1997. Could you tell me a little more about this series?

> For me, that work was I think a bit of a failure. (Laughs) It's difficult to talk about. Even back in [19]97, for art to handle trends in society or of temporary youth fashion phenomena, was what in Japanese is called *gohatto* [forbidden]. It was taboo, risky. Even now there is still that tendency but in those days it was much

stronger. It was for that reason that I thought I would like to paint a picture of a fleeting fashion.

Why do you think cuteness is so popular in Japan?
(Please tell me by adding concrete examples, such as *Pipo-kun*, or *rorikon*.)

Basically, it has been continuing since losing the Pacific War. A father's so called dignity has run out in Japan, don't you think? The police's *Pipo-kun* is surely very unusual within a global context. But it is also an embarrassing side of Japan. However, there is also a sense that it seems unnatural for a father to have a macho dignity. I sense that the dignity of the army or the police has been maintained only because they are straining to keep up the dignity. The situation Japan is placed in now is that frankly, where America has, in short a fatherly strength, while Europe has been trying to keep the equilibrium by continuing to flaunt the power which they had since the period of European imperialism. I don't understand much about history but perhaps imperialism was the peak of European power. When I went to Madrid in Spain, and saw the powerful looking buildings, they looked oppressive and strained and I felt they were protecting the glory of Spanish imperialism. I think that they were very macho. Murakami has said 'the future of the world will look like Japan.' He's speaking with a bit of an air of importance. Perhaps foreigners might be angered by this. However, perhaps this type of fatherly machismo will become a thing of the past.

Do you think it is a particularly Japanese notion?

With regard to having lost the war, in one way, more than countries that won, I think we became normal. We returned to our true selves, that we hadn't wanted to show anyone.

When do you think cuteness became important?

I don't think it was straight after the war. After the war, during the period of economic growth, fathers kept working to make money, without thought of their family. For the sons and daughters that grew up in that environment the father's

absence had psychological implications on their character formation, but this kind of analysis is not my strong point.

High school girls often appear in your works (for example in *Schoolgirl Blender* and *Harakiri Schoolgirls*).

Really, I think high school girls stand out in the city. In New York or London they aren't so conspicuous. In Tokyo's Maranouchi district there aren't so many, but in certain central areas like Shibuya the little lasses have taken over. If you live in Tokyo just going about your normal routine, whether you like it or not, they catch your eye. Good or bad, they are jumping out onto the scene. That's why I decided to paint a picture using them.

What do you think about the recent problems in Japan of *buru sera* shops and *enjokôsai*. What do you think about girls buying brand goods using that money and girls who are bought with money like merchandise?

Firstly, and I don't lie about things in these kinds of interviews, but I have never paid for a woman let alone a girl. As for my taste in women, I do not particularly wish to go out with women who wear brand goods [designer labels]. That's one thing, but at the same time, I don't feel too strongly regarding *shôjo* prostitution, it doesn't really raise my eyebrow. If for example a poor child in Asia, for example an 8-year-old, unable to judge right from wrong, were to sell their bodies for 100yen, I think that would be a tragedy. However girls mature early, so after 16 years old, they can act on their own judgment.

Regarding Okonogi Keigo's '*Moratorium ningen no jidai*' (The Age of the Moratorium People), do think today's youth are in a 'moratorium' condition?

Nowadays, moratorium has become commonplace. That book was published in [19]77, and in those days there were hard working students, hard working people, and only a very small number of rich kids. But then, even when they aren't rich, the number of people who are just hanging around is increasing. This was probably shocking. But 'moratorium' is an obsolete word now, we don't use it much. Recently

we say '*pûtarô*' [unemployed/slacker]. But now as we're in a recession, today's youth are more serious than I was when I was that age.

In the *DOG* series of 1989 and 1996/8, the girl has had her limbs amputated at the knees and elbows, and yet in a way she resembles like a teddy bear.

I didn't draw this with the intent of commenting on modern Japanese society. There are a number of stories like that. The most famous one, I'm not sure whether it's really true or not, is the two Japanese girls who went travelling in India. One went missing, the other came home. After several years looking for her, they found her in a show hut, her hands and feet had been amputated, it's a terrifying story. Maybe it's a made up story, but one comes across these kinds of stories often. It was in my head at the time. For me *Nihonga* is, even today, a genre that sells at very high prices. I looked for a way to make fun of it, not in order to destroy it, but because it was so over protected. So I put that idea together with the story of the girls. My painting method was a technique from the Taishô period. Today's *Nihonga* painters do not use such methods. A strange, rougher style. The method was an anachronistic old way of drawing, I thought let's use a subject that was beyond old or new, something that definitely wouldn't be dealt with. It's an expression of resistance to the *Nihonga* genre, and in that work there's not that much meaning in the fact of cutting the legs off.

From cuteness to the grotesque?

There are gimmicks with some similarities to *Mimi-chan*, the girl to be eaten. The situation is really cruel and sadistic, but the style and the atmosphere which the painting generates is completely opposite. They are very relaxed and every day, and the girls are just cute. By doing this I wanted to create a confusing balance that would make it hard for the viewers to know which emotion they should feel. To depict sadistic scenes by cutting off the legs, using passionate and forceful or violent touches happened often in the olden days. Therefore there is no need for me to do it this way and the idea is that it might be better to do the opposite and give it a quiet touch.

Could you tell me about the Mickey Mouse work in your 'my *kenten*' exhibition?

It's about the strictness of the Disney copyright that you hear so much about. Just the other day, in rural America, a normal old man decorated his children's room by painting Mickeys, but they found out, took him to court, he lost and had to paint the walls white. I thought Disney went a little too far. I remembered this when I was trying to think of something to depict. There are also cases where my work got copied and in those cases I also could become the victim of copyright infringement but then I tend to think that's just the way it is. On occasions I myself have also copied things. Asia is copy heaven. Probably because perhaps Asia is poor and therefore there may be many people who would gain popularity even by cheating. However, I think there are differences in thinking what is original or copy between Western and Asian people. It's not just the problem of money. However, I was not trying to tell such a high-minded story in this picture. It's just when I hear talk of Disney. I wonder if 'originality' is so important.

What do you think about the American influence on Japanese popular culture?
In *Mutant Hanako* the Americans look like monsters.

Of course there is. That the Americans were monsters was totally a joke. Of course a lot of American influence has come in, but Japan and America are different people, and the way the two countries formed was also different. Things that are popular in America are not always popular in Japan. Because I lived in America for 9 months, I know that some things might be brought across to Japan and some might not be. For example, *Friends*. I don't understand English, but occasionally there are bits I do understand and while watching *Friends* sometimes I laugh. When I got back to Japan, sure enough it was popular. American things, which one cannot see at all what is interesting about it, of course couldn't be brought over to Japan, don't you think?

What kind of writers have had an influence on you?
I would be interested to know what you think of Shibusawa Tatsuhiko.

I tried really hard to read Mishima Yukio. I'm not very knowledgeable but I like Mishima. I was introduced to Shibusawa through Mishima. I read Shibusawa coming from Mishima.

And Georges Bataille?

Indeed, part of the reason of why I did erotic type art was to keep in mind the eroticism which was written up in Shibusawa's book. As for Bataille, I have at times intended to read Shibusawa's translation, but as I have never yet read it properly, I don't really know much about it. However, I do know Georges Bataille which came via Shibusawa. I am thinking that he must be an interesting person somehow, but I am not knowledgeable about him. At the beginning of Georges Bataille's book entitled 'Accursed Share', there's a theory that because the sun's energy is coming to the earth in excess, what is important for people to do is to squander, i.e., to waste money and that working is not important. I forgot if I read that directly or if I read it in Shibusawa's books, but I remember that I experienced it as a revelation in my youth.

Some have criticised you as right wing, but what do you think about it?

The fact that my works are called right wing has, to start with, a personal reason. It sounds silly once one says it, but my father was left wing. He is a sociology professor at a University in Niigata. For example, he was invited to North Korea and went there. Countries he went to included only the former Soviet Union, North Korea, and China. So to say, as a son I did the opposite. One, especially when young, always tends to go against one's father, don't you think. However, as I grew older, now I am considering myself very left wing. In senior high school and university days I became rebellious against my father. My rebellious period came quite late. At junior high school period I was placid, but during my university days finally my rebellious period arrived. Furthermore, before my debut, while I was a student, among cultured people, especially in contemporary art, it was a big prerequisite to be left leaning to start with. There was a climate that those who were not were told to go to a different world. In newspapers and public opinions, some were sarcastic to *Asahi shinbun* (*Asahi Newspaper*) or taking positions like those of

the *Bungei shunjû* and the *Sankei shinbun* (*Sankei Newspaper*) [similarly critical to *Asahi shinbun*] and therefore there was a [balanced] opposition between left and right, but in the world of art there was only the *Asahi shinbun* position, there was no *Bungei shunjû* side. If there was, it was not in contemporary art, but found in *Nitten* or *Nihonga*. In literature there were Ôe Kenzaburô, Mishima, left wing, right wing, and they were all accepted. But in fine art, only the left, I thought that was unnatural. At the time of my debut, I wanted to give the Japanese art world a shock. The complex way of thinking of the son of a left winger. In addition, it was the rebellion against an art world which excludes the right wing. However, more recently I am thinking that there's no need to do this type of work any more. From now on it is unlikely that I will deal with ultra-nationalistic themes. Plenty of right-wing type of things have come in to the art as well. More recently there's almost too much of them. I am thinking that perhaps I don't need to do it anymore.

You have sometimes painted in the style of *Nihonga*. Please explain this a little more.

It may be a too simplistic formula, but I think it has a character similar to the Emperor system. Today, the Emperor system is not related to fascism. Smiling and waving at the people from a car type of existence. Hereafter it looks like it will survive. Therefore, I have a feeling that in the same way *Nihonga* will also continue to survive. *Nihonga* is the representative of Japan, and hereafter it will probably try to continue to be the representative. Now Japanese people don't think the Emperor is a god. Secretly they might be thinking Aiko [Princess Hironomiya's baby] also isn't cute. In the same way Japanese people won't try to kill off *Nihonga*. They would try to make *Nihonga* into a symbol of Japan. There is perhaps a kind of character of a Japanese don't you think? I think because of this contemporary art won't take root completely. These two problems are a set. Maybe, even when artists that do this kind of contemporary art would leave great works, influence culture, and leave their name in history, contemporary art would probably never become a representative of Japanese culture.

Warhol has become America's representative. Why? Is it because Japan didn't have a people's revolution? Japan's democracy is perhaps different from Euro-American

democracy, isn't it. However, I am not that knowledgeable in history.

椹木野衣は、あなたの作品は村上さんのようにスーパーフラットではないと言っています。なぜならあなたの作品は成し遂げてることにおいて未だ皮肉があるからだそうです。それについてどう思いますか？

。。。自分の絵が高く売れたりするのも、良い事かどうかはわかりません。村上さんは、日本美術を代表してる。村上さんの活動は、モチベーションが社会活動みたいです。僕は、実は日本なんかどうなったっていい。無責任。自分のことしか考えてない。村上さんは日本画学科出身なんです。僕は日本画っぽいものも描くんですが、油絵学科出身なんです。でも、村上さんも僕も、最近、使っている絵の具は、アクリル絵の具です。どちらも伝統的な油絵の具や日本画の岩絵の具っていうものは使っていない。たぶん、明治から、日本画と油絵は根本的に何か違っているものがあったと思います。日本画っていうのは、明治から、何を表現するかっていうと、日本精神とか、日本の心とか、日本の美とかを、絵描きが表現するというのが使命としてあった。でも、油絵科、洋画科というのは、俺は感受性豊かで、女にもてて、個性的な絵を描いて、人生を楽しんで、そして死んでいく、というような、梅原隆三郎みたいなものがある。そういう伝統が多少、残っている。平山郁夫さんの活動も、社会的で、官僚みたいです。村上さんの作品も官僚みたいなところありますよね。社会のために働いているというか。僕にはそういうのは全くないです。

1997年にキティちゃんや他のサンリオキャラクターが群女図シリーズに出ていますが、このシリーズについてもう少し教えて下さい。

この作品は、僕本人としては、ちょっと失敗作だと思っているんです。（笑）なかなか話にくいんですが。。。97年当時でも、世の中の流行とか、若者の一時的な流行の現象を美術で扱うというのは、日本語で言うと「ご法度」だったんです。「タブー」、「リスキー」なことでした。今でもそういう風潮はありますが、当時はもっとそういう風潮が強かった。だからこそ、一時的な流行を使って、絵を描いてみようかなと思ったのです。

なぜ日本では可愛らしさがそれほど人気だと思いますか？
（ピーポクンやロリコンなど、具体例を付け加えて教えて下さい)

その根本は、太平洋戦争で負けてから、ずっと続いているんでしょうね。父親の威厳というのが、日本ではなくなっていますよね。
警察をピポ君というのは、世界的にも珍しいですよね。でも、それは日本の恥ずかしい面でもある。けれど、父親のマッチョな威厳というのは不自然なところも感じるし、軍隊や警察の威厳というのも、頑張って威厳を維持しようとして維持されるような気がしてます。日本の今のような状況は、正直言って、要するにアメリカとかも父親的な強さがあるし、ヨーロッパの帝国主義の時代からの力を誇示し続けて、安定をキープしようとしている。歴史は良く分かりませんが、それは、帝国主義時代にピークになったんでしょうね。スペインのマドリッドに行った時、強そうな建物を見ると、重苦しくて、力んでいて、スペインの帝国主義の栄光を守っていることを感じます。すごくマッチョだったんだなって思います。村上さんは、「日本は世界の未来の姿」と言っています。少し偉そうな言い方ですね。外人さん聞いたら怒るかもしれないけど。もしかしたら、こういうことも、父親的なマッチョなことも、遠い昔のことになるかもしれないですが。

それは特別な日本の概念観念だと思いますか？

戦争に負けたことによって、ある部分、勝った国よりも、正常になったと思います。誰にも見せたくない、本当の姿に戻ったんです。

いつ可愛らしさが重要になったと思われますか？

戦後すぐではないでしょう。戦後、お父さんたちが高度経済成長の中、お金儲けのために働き続けて、家庭を顧みなかった。そういう中で育った息子や娘に、精神的に影響が出て、人格形成において、彼らは父親不在だったんでしょうね。僕は、こういう分析は苦手ですが。

女子高生があなたの作品にでてきます。
（例として、スクールガールブレンダーや腹切りスクールガールズ)

やっぱり、街中でも、女子高生が目立ってるような気がします。ニューヨークやロンドンを歩いていても、スクールガールは、あまり目立たないですよね。でも、東京は丸の内にはあまりいないけれど、渋谷などの都心が小娘どもに占領されている。普通に東京に暮らしていても、嫌でも目を引く。良くも悪くも、彼女たちが飛び出してきたんです。だから、彼女たちを使って絵を描こうと思いました。

日本現代文化の問題として、ブルセラや援助交際についてどう思います?その金でブランド品を買う少女と、お金で商品として買われる少女について、どう思います?

僕は、こういうところで、嘘は言わないんですが、少女だけではなく、女性をお金で買ったことはないです。それに、女性の好みとしても、ブランド品を身につけているような女性とお付き合いしたいとは思いませんね。まず、これがひとつ。ただ、それと同時に、僕は、少女の売春に関しては、あまり目くじら立てる気持ちが起きないんです。たとえば、アジアの貧しい子、たとえば8歳とか、まったく、判断ができない人々。たとえば、100円で、体を売ってしまうのは悲劇だと思う。でも、女の子は自我が発達するのが早いから、16歳を過ぎたら、もう自分の判断で行動できますよね。

小此木啓吾の「モラトリアム人間の時代」という本がありますが、今の若者は「モラトリアム」状態にあると思いますか？

今は、モラトリアムというのは当たり前になってますよね。この本が出版された77年当時、がんばって勉強する大学生と、汗水たらして働く人と、それとごくごく少数のお金持ちの息子がいた。だけど、お金持ちでもないのに、ぶらぶらしてる人が増えてきて、それが衝撃的だったんでしょう。でも、モラトリアムは、今

は、死語ですよね。あまり使わないです。最近は、「プー太郎」とかって言いますよね。さすがに、不景気になってきたから、僕の若いときよりも、最近の若者はシリアスになってきてますね。

1989年と1996-1998年のDOGシリーズは少女の手足は膝と肘で切断されながらもテディベアーのようにみえます。

あれは、現代日本社会とかを表現したくて描いたわけじゃない。あのような物語はいろいろあるんです。一番有名なのは、ほんとの話か分からないのですが、ある日本人の女の子二人がインドに旅行して、一人が行方不明になって、ひとりが帰ってきて、彼女を探していたら、数年後、インドの見世物小屋で、その子が手足を切られてたっていう怖い話。これは作り話かもしれないけど、このような話ってよくあるじゃないですか。それが頭の中にあったんですね。それから、僕は日本画は、今でも高い値段で取引されているジャンルです。それを、ぶっ潰そうというわけじゃないんですが、守られ過ぎていたので、おちょくる方法を探してた。そのことと、その女の子の話をくっつけてみたんです。僕のあの描き方は、大正時代とかの手法で、現代の日本画家はあんな手法はしないんです。もっとざらざらした変な手法です。手法は、時代錯誤な古い描き方で、モチーフは新しいも古いも超えて、絶対扱わないものを使おうと思いました。日本画っていうジャンルへの抵抗を表現していて、その作品では、足を切るということに対する意味はあまりないです。

かわいさからグロテスクへ？

食用少女ミミちゃんも多少似たような仕掛けがあります。状況的にはいかにも残酷でサディスティックだけど、画風や絵が漂わせる雰囲気はあくまでも逆で、落ち着いていて平常心な日常的で、あくまでも女の子はかわいらしく、そうすることによって見る人がどっちの感情を起こしたらいいか混乱するようなバランスにしたいと思って、足を切るとか、情熱的に激しいタッチや暴力的なタッチでサデ

ィスティックな場面で描くというのは昔から多い。だから僕がやることはなくて逆に静かなタッチでやった方がいいかなという考えです。

My 県展でのミッキーマウスについて教えて下さい。

あれはディズニーの著作権の厳しさは良く聞いています。こないだも、アメリカの田舎の普通のおじさんが、子供のために子供部屋にミッキーを描いてあげたのが見つかって、裁判で負けて、壁を白く塗らされたという話があった。それはいくらなんでも、ディズニーはやりすぎだなって思いました。何を描こうかと考えていたときに、それを思い出しました。僕も、僕の作品が真似されたりする場合もあるわけで、著作権に関しては被害者にもなりえるわけです。でも、それもしょうがないって思うこともあるし、僕自身もパクることもある。アジアはコピー天国です。アジアは貧しくて、ずるしても人気を得ようとする人が多いのかもしれません。でも、西洋人とアジア人にとって、オリジナルとコピーの考え方の違いもあるような気がします。金の問題だけじゃなくて。でも、この絵で、そんな高尚な話をするつもりはないんです。ただ、ディズニーの話を聞くと、オリジナルってそんなに大切なのかな？って思います。

日本の大衆文化においてアメリカの影響をどう思われますか？
ミュータントハナコの中で、アメリカ人はモンスターみたい。

もちろんあります。アメリカ人がモンスターなのは、あれは完全にジョークです。アメリカの影響がもちろんいっぱい入っているけれど、もともと日本とアメリカでは、民族が違うし、国の成り立ちも違う。アメリカで人気があるものが、日本で人気があるわけではないです。アメリカに9ヶ月住んでいたから、分かるんですが。日本へ持ってこれそうなものと、持ってこれなさそうなものがあります。「Friends」とかね。僕は、英語が分からないんですが、時々分かるところもあって、Friends を見ていて、時々笑っていたりしたんです。それで、日本帰ったら、やっぱり人気あった。全くどこが面白いのか分からないアメリカのものは、やっぱり日本にも持って来られないですよね。

どんな作家に影響されましたか？
あなたが澁澤龍彦をどう思っているのか興味があります。

三島由紀夫は僕なりに一生懸命読んでました。僕はすごく詳しいわけじゃないけど、三島は好きです。渋沢龍彦は三島に紹介してもらいました。三島の流れで、渋沢を読みました。

ジョルジュ　バタイユは？

確かに、エロチック系のアートをやる理由の理屈の部分は、渋沢さんの本に書いてあったエロティシズムを念頭にしました。バタイユは、訳本をちゃんと読もうと思ったことをあるけど、ちゃんと読んだことはないから、ほとんど知らない。ただ、渋沢経由のジョルジュ・バタイユは知ってます。なんとなく、おもしろい人だろうとは思ってますが、詳しくないです。ジョルジュ・バタイユの、「呪われた部分」という本の冒頭で、「太陽のエネルギーが地球に過剰に行っているから、人間のやることは蕩尽、つまり無駄遣いが重要で、労働は大切ではない」というテーゼがありました。これは直接読んだのか渋沢の著書で読んだのか忘れましたが、目から鱗が落ちる思いを、若い頃したのを覚えています。

あなたについて、右翼的という批判がありますが、どのように思いますか？

僕の作品が右翼的というのは、まず、個人的な理由があります。これを言ってしまえば、バカバカしいのですが、僕の父親が左翼だったんです。父親は新潟の大学の社会学の教授なんです。北朝鮮に招待されて行ったりしてます。父親の行った国は、旧ソビエトと、北朝鮮と、中国しかないんです。まあ、息子として、逆をしたのです。特に、若い頃の常として、父親の逆を行きがちですよね。ただ、年を取ってきて、今は、僕はとても左翼的だと思ってるんです。高校時代や大学の頃は、父親に反抗的になっていた。僕は反抗期が遅かった。中学時代はおとなしかったんですが、大学時代にやっと反抗期が来た。それから、僕がデビューす

る前、学生の頃、文化人（その中でも特に現代美術）では、左よりであることがまず大前提としてあった。そうでない人は、別世界に行きなさい、という風潮だった。新聞や言論だったら、朝日新聞なんかに嫌味を言ったり、文芸春秋やサンケイ新聞みたいな立場があって、そういう右左の対立があるけれど、美術の世界では朝日新聞側しかない。文芸春秋側がなかった。あるとしたら、現代美術じゃなくて、日展とか、日本画ですね。文学では、大江健三郎や三島とか、右翼でも左翼でも、みんな認められている。でも、美術では、「左」だけで、それは不自然と思った。デビュー当時は、日本の美術界にショックを与えたかった。左翼の息子の複雑な思い。それと、右翼を排除する現代美術に対しての反抗です。ただ、最近は、そういう仕事は、もうやらなくていいと思っています。今後は、国粋主義的なテーマは扱わないでしょうね。充分、右翼的なものが美術の中にも入ってきた。最近は、それらが多すぎるくらいです。もう、僕がやらなくてもいいかな、と思ってます。

日本画のスタイルで描かれていますがそれについて少し説明をして下さい。

簡単すぎる図式かもしれないけど、天皇制と似た性質があるんだと思います。今は、天皇制もファシズムとは縁がない。ニコニコ笑って、車から、国民に手を振るような存在ですね。ただ、今後も、それは生き残りそうですよね。だから、日本画も同じように生き残り続ける気がする。日本画は日本の代表ですし、今後も代表であり続けようとするでしょうね。今、日本人は天皇を神とも思ってない。内心は愛子さんも可愛くない、と思ってたりする。それと同じように、日本人は、日本画を滅ぼそうとはしない。日本画を、日本の象徴としようとする。なんか日本人の性質があるんでしょうね。それゆえに、現代美術は完全に定着しないと思う。この二つの問題はセットです。たぶん、こんなに現代美術の作家が偉大な作品を残して、文化に影響を与えて、歴史に名を残したとしても、現代美術は日本の文化の代表にはならないでしょうね。ウォーホルはアメリカンの代表になります。なぜでしょうね？日本は、市民革命をしなかったからでしょうか。日本の民主主義が、欧米の民主主義と違うんでしょうね。歴史はあまりくわしくないのですが。

II. Murakami Takashi Interview

20th November 2004

Why do you think cuteness is so popular in Japan?

It's not so simple. Now I am making an exhibition called 'Little Boy' at the Japan Society in New York in April next year. I think the roots of where cute culture came are the atomic bomb.

Like in [your work] *Time Bokan*?

Yes that's right. I think that what is called Japanese culture is after all impotent. How should I say, we don't believe in building up nation to nation relations aggressively, or things like that, we really don't believe in the so called structure that is nation. European countries, China and Korea all believe in the concept of nation. We fundamentally cannot believe in our country. The reason is in the end because there were the atomic bombs, then many things were rebuilt by America, really we were organized in a comfortable way. However, we also want to get excited, there is that spirit. Sex and drugs, for example, raves for example, various cultures came out, didn't they. I think that there is a reason why those things appeared. In the same way cuteness came out in Japan, and people can get excited by that. Because people are excited by it, it created a boom, and it became more and more popular. I think there will be many people who think that going to a club and saying 'ah' is a different feeling from saying '*kawaii*', but I think that these two are the same. Something like the pleasant feeling when endorphins are released (pshew) in the brain, that sort of pleasant feeling 'ah'.

There's the police mascot *Pipo-kun*, *rorikon* also has a popularity.

As for that, after all isn't there also a relation with the so-called 'cuteness'. If you make everything cute at least you can create a common language. I am now working on an article as to why cute culture came to be so widespread; I haven't found a simple answer yet that can be said in a single comment.

Sometimes *Mr. Dob* transforms into a monster, why is that?

Underlying the theme of my work, or should I say underneath the cute culture of Japan there is always the feeling of apocalypse. Therefore I have put those feelings together. By doing that I wanted to express myself in a way that was honest to myself.

Last week I went to the Mizuki Shigeru exhibition.

Mr. Mizuki is also about war. It's a mind escape from the anguish of war. There was too much adversity, by doing that kind of strange creature mindset, he escaped from there. Isn't that very interesting. In Japanese religion there is the *yaorozunokami*, isn't there. I think that is also escape from suffering.

なぜ日本では可愛らしさがそれほど人気だと思いますか？

そんなシンプルなことじゃなくて、僕今ちょうど展覧会を作ってんでしょう「リトルボーイ」という来年の4月に、あのNYのジャパンソサエティーである。でそのかわいいカルチャーが出てきたルーツは、アトミックボンブだと思ったんでね。

タイムボカンとか？

そうです。日本のカルチャーっていうのは、やっぱりインポだと思うんですよ。なんていうかなアグレッシブに、国と国との関係を作ったりとか、「国」という組織そのものを信じていないんです、まったく。ヨーロッパの国々とか中国とか韓国とか、みんな国を信じているんです。僕らは国を信じられないんだよね根本から。なんでかっていうと、やぱり原爆があってアメリカにいろいろ作られてきて、でま本当に気持ちよくこうオーガナイズされてきているからだね。でも、僕らにも興奮したい、そのスピリトがある。例えば性またドラッグとか例えばレイブでもいろいろカルチャー出て来たが出てくるじゃないですか。それぞれそいうものが出来てきたのには、理由があると思うんです。それと同じように、日本では「かわいい」っていうものが、で皆興奮できる。興奮しているからこんなブームになったんだと思うしどんどん出ってくんですよね。「かわいい」ていうやっぱり皆なんかこうクラブに行って「あーっ」っていうのと全然違うフィーリングだと思っているかもしれないけど、僕は同じところにあると思う。何かその脳内エンドルフィンが「ピシュ」と出て、「あー」というそういう快感。

警察のピポ君というキャラがあったり、ロリコンも人気があるんですよね。

それは、やはり「かわいい」ということに関係があるんでしょうか。なんでもかんでもかわいくすれば、一応、共通言語ができるからね。僕は、今、なぜこんなに「かわいい」カルチャーが広がっているかに関する論文を書

いている途中なんです。だから、一言で言えるようなシンプルな答えはまだ見つかってません。

ときどきドブ君はモンスターに変身しますが、それはなぜですか？

僕の作品のテーマの裏、というか、日本の「かわいいカルチャー」の裏には、常に、「アポカリプス」な黙示録的なフィーリングがあるんです。だから僕はそれらのフィーリングを合体させたんです。それによって、僕は、自分自身に対して正直な気持ちを表現したかったんです。

―先週、水木しげるの展覧会に行ってきました。

水木さんも戦争でしょ。戦争の苦しみから逃れるための「マインドエスケープ」ですよね。あまりに辛いことがありすぎたからこそ、あのような奇妙なクリチャーをマインドセットすることによって、そこからエスケープした。すごく面白いですよね。日本の宗教に「八百万の神」ってあるじゃないですか。あれは、辛さからのエスケープだと思います。

III. Mori Mariko Interview

15th December 2004

This interview conducted in English unlike the other interviews.

Play With Me positions you in Akihabara, just before the huge *otaku* boom there.

> Before I moved to New York, I was in London for 4 years, so altogether for five or six years I wasn't really living in Tokyo. When I came back and visited my family I was quite shocked about the whole thing, it was like a culture shock for me. I was able to see objectively, as an observer from the outside, rather than from the inside. I was able to look at it more objectively. But also it really symbolised the culture at the time, how people were communicating through technology, but by themselves not with each other, only with the technology.

Could you tell me a little more about the work *Love Hotel*?

> At the time I was really interested in the social issues of a culture. There were many high school kids dating with older men, I found it was quite an awful situation, and so I wanted to criticise that aspect of society. In order to express that I wanted to put in a cyborg rather than a real human, it's metaphorical of the human being like a robot, or treated like a robot, or being treated like a doll. So it was a kind of metaphor for the social structure, and my criticism of this social issue.

Why do you think *rorikon* is so popular, this fascination with cuteness?

> Well I think first of all since I lived in London and New York for a long time and came back to Tokyo from time to time I realised that the culture itself, it's very for children, orientated toward children. So the children are the centre of the social structure culturally. So all the cute objects, and cute characters that was actually for children, obviously.

It spreads into quite strange places though, even the police have the cute *Pipo-kun*.

Yes obviously originally it's for children, but like you, I was also very interested in why adult people were still reading comic books, and why office ladies, career women, or businessmen were still buying character goods, very cute stuff, and still liking *Hello Kitty* and things, and I didn't quite understand it myself. Perhaps it creates happiness, or the illusion of happiness somehow, by going back to your childhood, your happy childhood life, remembering your childhood.

So it's nostalgic.

Yes nostalgic, plus it's maybe a kind of escapism. You know being an adult is not an easy thing, you have to be responsible, there are many stressful things, and the more stressful your life is, the more you want to escape, the more you want to be happy. Those characters are endlessly smiling at you, and that gives you some *nagomu*, you know the Japanese word meaning to feel relaxed or feel fulfilled. I think the culture of cuteness that you are researching; it gives a kind of extra feeling of happiness to the culture.

In your work *Pure Land*, in this case is the cuteness like a rebirth, or cuteness perhaps representing the innocence of children?

When I saw the Bodhisattvas, and the Buddhist statues, the peacefulness and the fulfilment, those kinds of emotions, or rather those kinds of feelings, are substituted on to the cartoon characters. In other words when you look at a Buddhist sculpture people expect to feel peaceful, people expect to feel fulfilled. It seems to me in contemporary culture that the cute icons are a substitute for the Buddhist sculpture in our culture, to make you feel calm, relaxed, to feel good.

In some *anime* and games the girls are very cute and young, but also very powerful, like *Sailor Moon* for example, or *Cutey Honey*.

I think it is reality that I portrayed in *Love Hotel*, but comics and animation, they are a portrait of people's dreams, their fantasies. So the strong women, they are probably a Japanese way of expressing feminism. Those comics were written by

female artists, sometime male artists too, but I think it's probably the projection of a dream of contemporary society.

Why do you think cuteness is so popular in Japan, compared to America or England?

Maybe that's interwoven through a long history, not only in contemporary culture. You can find cuteness in the Edo period, cuteness in the 16th century, 8th century, you know I even find cuteness in the Jomon period. Cuteness plus maybe wit. And plus there's no expression. *Hello Kitty* doesn't have an expression.

You mean she doesn't have a mouth?

She has no mouth, but also no mask. She doesn't have an expression. It's your mind that reads what her feelings are. Maybe, historically that's something Japanese people do get attracted to.

Recently I asked Murakami Takashi this question and he connected it to the end of the war and the atomic bombs.

That's how he thinks. Of course there's some influence. There is a darkness in 70s comics, in 60s comics, post-war comics. That I can see. It is probably post-war syndrome, but the cute characters, which you're talking about, I don't feel any darkness.

Is it then a covering up, or is it a kind of rebirth?

I feel it's more like wish fulfilment. I think those *otaku* things, which obviously had started much earlier, but in fact after the economic bubble the phenomenon of cuteness was even more exaggerated, I think, so optimism. That's how I see it. For my childhood, maybe around the 70s to early 80s, there was some kind of post-war movement, but those characters like *Hello Kitty* and other characters, maybe it's to hide the darkness, or maybe the absence of darkness. That's what people wanted at that time, maybe they were sick of darkness.

When do you think the cute boom really started?

I think it's a real luxury thing to be able to make a life just for children, to create a world for the children. If the country is poor or in a war people cannot really think like that. To have a world for children, and be able to focus just on children, it must be something to do with economic growth that people are able to create something for kids. But that actually became consumed by adults also. I think when you look at Disney and *Hello Kitty*, there's definitely a difference.

Between Disney and *Hello Kitty*?

Yes. Disney and *Hello Kitty*, or other comics, definitely. That's my opinion. Disney is like adult created for children, *Hello Kitty* is more childish, a childlike mind created it for children. Another one is an adult businessman creating for a child. A childlike person creating for a child is totally different. It's more honest, more vulnerable. And that is what attracted adults in the end. Because it's the innocence, and that's something you lost.